

3 1822 01053 2919

A Happy Boy

LIBRARY

UNIVERSITY OF
CALIFORNIA
SAN DIEGO



3 1822 01053 2919

817

65

1E5

1875

Digitized by the Internet Archive
in 2008 with funding from
Microsoft Corporation

<http://www.archive.org/details/happyboy00bj>

THE NOVELS OF
BJÖRNSTJERNE BJÖRNSON

Edited by EDMUND GOSSE

VOLUME III

THE NOVELS OF
BJÖRNSTJERNE BJÖRNSSON

Edited by EDMUND GOSSE

Fcap. 8vo, cloth, 3s net

Synnöve Solbakken

Arne

A Happy Boy

The Fisher Lass

The Bridal March, & A Day

Maguhild, & Dust

Captain Mansaua, & Mother's Hands

Absalom's Hair, & A Painful Memory

In God's Way (2 vols.)

The Heritage of the Kurts (2 vols.)

LONDON

WILLIAM HEINEMANN

21 Bedford Street, W.C. 2.

A HAPPY BOY

BY

BJÖRNSTJERNE BJÖRNSEN

Translated from the Norwegian

By Mrs. W. ARCHER

LONDON

WILLIAM HEINEMANN

1917

Uniform Edition
First published February 1896
New Impressions February 1909,
August 1913, September 1917

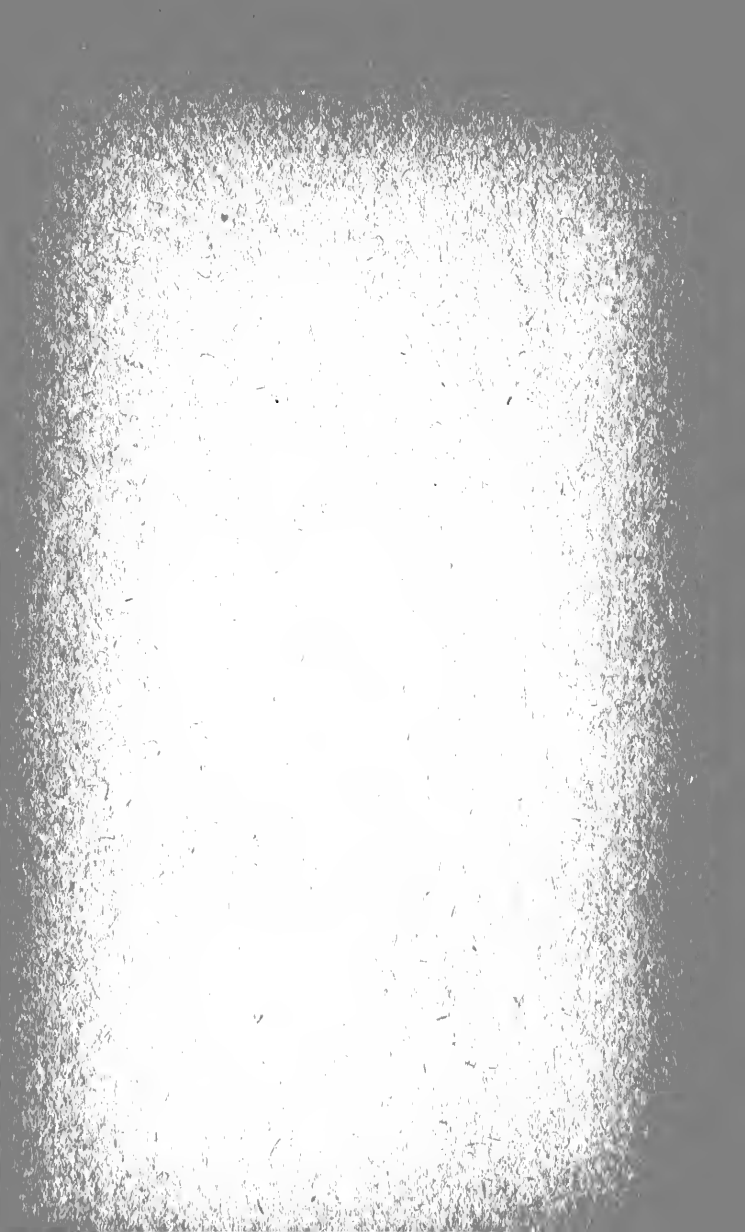
All rights reserved

BIBLIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

[*A HAPPY BOY* was originally published in the Christiania newspaper "*Aftenbladet*," 1859-60. Later on, in 1860, it was printed in a revised form at the close of the collected volume called "*Smaaestykker*" ("Small Pieces"), issued at Bergen. It has never appeared in the original as an independent publication. The story was begun in Christiania in 1858, and finished at Søgne Parsonage in 1859.

A Swedish translation was published in 1862, and another in Finnish in the same year. A Dutch version, without date, is said to have appeared still earlier. The earliest English translation was printed in 1869, and the story has always been a great favourite in this country. There are versions in French, German, Icelundic, Croatian and other languages.

E. G.]



A HAPPY BOY

CHAPTER I

HE was called Eyvind, and he cried when he was born. But as soon as he could sit up on his mother's knee he laughed; and when they lighted the candle at evening, he laughed till the place rang again, but cried when he could not get to it.

"This boy will be something out of the common," said his mother.

A bare rock frowned over the house where he was born, but it was not high; fir and birch trees looked down from its brow, and the wild cherry strewed blossoms on the roof. A little goat which belonged to Eyvind roamed about the roof; he had to be kept up there lest he should

A HAPPY BOY

stray, and Eyvind carried leaves and grass up to him. One fine day the goat hopped over and away up the rock; he went straight ahead and came to a place where he had never been before. Eyvind could not see the goat when he came out after tea, and thought at once of the fox. He got hot all over, looked about, and called: "Goatie-goatie, and goatie-wee!"

"Ba-a-a-a!" said the goat up on the hillside, looking down with his head on one side.

But a little girl was kneeling beside the goat.

"Is he your goat?" she asked.

Eyvind stood with open mouth and eyes, and thrust both hands into the pockets of his little breeches.

"Who are you?" he asked.

"I am Marit, mother's baby, father's mouse, little fairy in the house, grand-daughter of Ole Nordistuen of the hill-farms, four years old in autumn, two days after the first frost-nights, I am!"

"Are you though?" said he, drawing a long

A HAPPY BOY

breath, for he had not ventured to breathe whilst she was speaking.

"Is he your goat?" asked the girl again.

"Yes," said he, looking up.

"I've taken such a fancy to the goat. Will you not give him to me?"

"No, indeed, I won't."

She lay kicking her legs about and looking down at him, and then she said:

"If I were to give you a butter-cake for the goat, mightn't I have him then?"

Eyvind belonged to poor folks; he had eaten butter-cake only once in his life, that was when grandfather came to see them, and he had never tasted the like before nor since. He looked up at the girl.

"Let me see the cake first," said he. Without waiting to be asked twice, she showed him a large cake which she held in her hand.

"Here it is!" said she, and threw it down.

"Oh, it's all gone to pieces," said the boy, and he carefully gathered up every bit. He couldn't help just tasting the smallest, and it

A HAPPY BOY

was so good that he had to taste one bit more ; and before he knew what he was about he had eaten up the whole cake.

"Now the goat is mine," said the girl.

The boy stopped short with the last bit in his mouth, the girl lay and laughed, the goat with his white breast and dark fleece stood by her, looking down sideways.

"Couldn't you wait a bit?" begged the boy ; his heart began to throb within him. Then the girl laughed yet more and started up to her knees.

"No, no, the goat is mine," said she, and flung her arms about its neck ; then she loosed a garter and made a halter of it. Eyvind stood and looked on. She rose and began to drag the goat ; it would not go with her but stretched its neck down towards Eyvind. "Ba-a-a-a!" it said.

But she caught hold of its fleece with one hand, pulled at the garter with the other, and said prettily :

"Come goatie dear, you shall come indoors

A HAPPY BOY

and eat out of mother's nice dish and out of my apron," and then she sang:

Come, goat, to your sire,
Come, calf, from the byre ;
Come, pussy, that mews
In your snowy-white shoes ;
Come, ducklings so yellow,
Come, chickens so small,
Each soft little fellow
That can't run at all ;
Come, sweet doves of mine,
With your feathers so fine !
The turf's wet with dew,
But the sun warms it through.
It is early, right early, in summer-time still,
But call on the autumn, and hurry it will.

The boy was left alone. He had played with the goat ever since it was born in the winter, and it had never occurred to him that it could be lost; but now it was done all in a moment, and he was never to see it again.

His mother came singing up from the water-side with some vessels she had been scouring; she saw the boy sitting crying, with his legs under him in the grass, and went to him.

"What are you crying for?"

"Oh, the goat, the goat!"

A HAPPY BOY

"Well, where is the goat?" asked his mother looking up on the roof.

"He'll never come back," said the boy.

"Why, what has happened to him?"

He would not confess at once.

"Has the fox taken him?"

"Oh, I wish it were the fox!"

"Are you out of your senses?" said his mother. "What has become of the goat?"

"Oh, oh, oh!—I've been so unlucky—I've sold him for a butter-cake!"

Even as he said the words he realised what it was to sell the goat for a butter-cake; he had not thought of it before. His mother said:

"What do you suppose the little goat thinks of you, since you could go and sell him for a butter-cake?"

The boy himself thought of it, and realised very clearly that he could never be happy again in this world, nor even with God in heaven, he thought afterwards.

He was so heart-broken that he resolved

A HAPPY BOY

within himself never again to do anything wrong, neither to cut the thread on the distaff, nor to let the ewes out of the fold, nor to go down to the lake alone. He fell asleep there where he lay and dreamt that the goat had gone to heaven.

There sat Our Lord with a long beard, just as He was in the catechism, and the goat stood eating the leaves of a shining tree; but Eyvind sat on the roof alone and could not get up to him.

At that moment something wet poked right into his ear; he started up.

"Ba-a-a-a!" said a voice; and there was the goat come back.

"Oh, you've come back! you've come back."

He jumped up, took hold of his two forelegs and danced with him like a brother; he pulled his beard, and he was just going to take him right in to his mother, when he heard something behind him and saw the girl sitting on the grass just by his side. Now he understood it all, and he let go his hold of the goat.

A HAPPY BOY

"Is it you that have come with him?" She sat tearing up grass with her hand and said:

"I wasn't allowed to keep him; grandfather is sitting up there waiting."

As the boy stood looking at her he heard a sharp voice up on the road calling:

"Well!"

Then she remembered what she had to do. She rose and went up to Eyvind, laid one earth-stained hand in his and said:

"Forgive me!"

Then her resolution failed her, and she threw her arms round the goat and wept.

"I think you had better keep the goat," said Eyvind, looking away.

"Be quick now!" said the grandfather up on the slope. And Marit rose and walked up after him with dragging feet.

"You've forgotten your garter!" Eyvind called after her. She turned and looked first at the garter and then at him. At last she formed a great resolution and said with a thick voice:

A HAPPY BOY

"You can keep that."

He went up to her and took her hand. "I thank you," said he.

"Oh that's nothing to thank me for," she answered, heaved a prodigiously deep sigh, and went on her way.

He sat down on the grass again with the goat at his side ; but he somehow did not care for it so much as before.

CHAPTER II

THE goat was tethered near the wall of the house, but Eyvind kept looking up the hillside. His mother came out and sat by him; he wanted to hear tales about what was far away, for the goat was no longer enough for him. So he came to hear how once upon a time everything could talk: the mountain talked to the brook, and the brook to the river, and the river to the sea, and the sea to the sky. Then he wanted to know whether the sky did not talk to anything; and the sky talked to the clouds, and the clouds to the trees, and the trees to the grass, the grass to the flies, the flies to the animals, the animals to the children, the children to the grown-up people; and so it went on until it got round in a circle, and no one knew who had begun. Eyvind looked at the mountain, the

A HAPPY BOY

trees, the lake, the sky, and had never really seen them before. Just then the cat came out and laid herself on the flags in the sunshine.

"What does the cat say?" asked Eyvind, pointing.

His mother sang:

The evening sun sinks low in the skies
The cat lies lazily blinking her eyes.

"Two little mice,
Some cream—so nice—
Four bits of fish
I stole from a dish;
I got all I desired,
And I'm lazy and tired,"
Says the cat.

Then came the cock with all the hens.

"What does the cock say?" asked Eyvind, clapping his hands.

His mother sang:

Her wings the brood-hen sinks:
Stands on one leg the cock, and thinks:

"The grey gander
Will soar and wander,
But he can never, heigh, heigh!
Be half so clever as I!
In, in, ye hens, and get out of the way!
The sun has a holiday turn to-day,"
Says the cock.

A HAPPY BOY

Then two little birds sat and sang upon the ridge of the roof.

"What are the birds saying?" asked Eyvind, laughing.

"Dear God, how sweet it is to live
For those who neither toil nor strive,"
Say the birds.

Thus she went through what all the animals said, right down to the ant which crawled through the moss, and the worm that ticked in the bark.

That same summer, his mother began to teach him to read. He had long possessed books and thought a great deal about how it would be when they too began to talk. Now the letters turned into beasts, birds, and everything that existed. Soon they began to group themselves together two and two; *a* stood and rested under a tree called *b*, then *c* came and did the same; but when three or four came together it was as if they were angry with one another; they did not get on well at all. And the more he learned the more he forgot what they were. He remembered

A HAPPY BOY

a the longest, because he was fondest of it; it was a little black lamb and was friends with all. But soon he forgot even *a*; the book no longer contained fairy tales, but only lessons.

One day his mother came in and said to him :

"To-morrow school begins again, and you are to go with me up to the school-house."

Eyvind had heard that school was a place where many boys played together, and he had no objection. On the contrary, he was much pleased ; he had often been at the school-house, but never when school was going on, and he walked quicker than his mother up the hills, for he was eager. They entered the vestibule, and a great hum met them like that of the mill-house at home. He asked his mother what it was.

"It's the children reading," she answered, and he was very glad to hear it, for that was how he had read before he knew his letters. When he went in there were so many children sitting round a table that even at church there were not more. Others sat on their dinner-

A HAPPY BOY

boxes along the wall; some stood in groups around a blackboard; the schoolmaster, an old grey-haired man, sat on a stool by the fireplace filling his pipe. When Eyvind and his mother entered, they all looked up and the mill-hum stopped, as when the water is turned off. They all looked at the new-comers. Eyvind's mother greeted the schoolmaster, who returned her salutation.

"Here I come with a little boy who wants to learn to read," said his mother.

"What's the young man's name?" asked the schoolmaster, fumbling in his leather pouch for tobacco.

"Eyvind," said his mother. "He knows his letters and he can put them together."

"Ah, indeed!" said the schoolmaster, "come here, little white-head."

Eyvind went to him; the schoolmaster lifted him on his knee and took off his cap.

"What a pretty little boy," said he, and stroked his hair; Eyvind looked up into his eyes and laughed.

A HAPPY BOY

"Is it at me you're laughing?" he frowned.

"Yes, of course it is," answered Eyvind, and roared with laughter. Then the schoolmaster laughed too, the mother laughed, the children perceived that they might laugh as well, and so they all laughed together.

And that was how Eyvind entered school.

When he was to take his place they all wanted to make room for him; but he took a good look round first. They whispered and pointed; he turned around to every side with his cap in his hand, and his book under his arm.

"Well, have you made up your mind?" asked the schoolmaster, still working away at his pipe. Just as the boy was turning to the schoolmaster, he saw close beside him, down by the hearth-stone, sitting on a little red box, Marit of the many names; she had hidden her face in her two hands and sat peeping out at him.

"I will sit here," said Eyvind resolutely, and, taking a box, he seated himself by her side.

Now she lifted the arm that was next to him

A HAPPY BOY

a little and looked at him under her elbow ; he instantly covered his face too with both hands and looked at her under his elbow. So they sat behaving in this foolish way until she laughed, then he laughed, the children saw and laughed too ; thereupon a terribly loud voice struck in, becoming milder by degrees however :

“ Be quiet you young trolls, urchins, imps ! be quiet and good, my poppets ! ”

It was the schoolmaster, who had a way of flying out, but calmed down again before he finished. The school became instantly quiet, until the pepper-mill began to go again and they read aloud each in his book ; the trebles struck up in a high key, the deeper voices got sharper and sharper to keep in the ascendant, and now and then one or another gave a great whoop. In all his born days Eyvind had never had such fun.

“ Is it always like this, here ? ” he whispered to Marit.

“ Yes, just like this, ” said she.

By-and-by they had to go to the schoolmaster

A HAPPY BOY

and read; a little boy was then set to learn with them, and then they were released and allowed to go back and sit quietly again.

"I've got a goat too, now," said Marit.

"Have you?"

"Yes; but he's not so pretty as yours."

"Why have you never come up on the rock again?"

"Grandfather is afraid I shall fall over."

"But it's not very high."

"Grandfather won't let me, all the same."

"Mother knows such a lot of songs," said Eyvind.

"So does grandfather, I can tell you."

"Yes; but he doesn't know the ones mother knows."

"Grandfather knows one about a dance. Do you want to hear it?"

"Yes, very much."

"Well then, you must come farther over here that the schoolmaster mayn't hear."

He moved along and then she repeated to him a little bit of a song, four or five times over,

A HAPPY BOY

so that the boy learned it ; and that was the first thing he learned at school.

"Dance," shrieked the fiddle,
And squeaked with its string so
That up jumped the bailiff's
Son and cried "Ho!"
"Stop!" shouted Ola,
Stuck out his leg, so
It tripped up the bailiff,
And all the girls laughed.

"Hop," murmured Erik,
And leaped to the roof-tree,
Till all the beams cracked and
The walls gave a scream.
"Stop!" shouted Elling,
Caught hold of his collar,
And lifted him high—"You're
As weak as a cat!"

"Hey!" called out Rasmus,
Caught Randi and spun her,
"Hurry and give me
That kiss, don't you know?"
"No," answered Randi,
And boxed his ears soundly,
And slipped from his arm with
"Take that for your pains!"

"Up children!" cried the schoolmaster. "As this is our first day you shall go early; but first we must have prayers and a hymn."

At once a great racket sprang up in the

A HAPPY BOY

school; they jumped on forms, ran about the room, and all talked at once.

"Be quiet you young imps, you young scamps, you young ruffians; be quiet and walk across the room nicely; there's good children!" said the schoolmaster, and they went quietly to their places and calmed down, whereupon the schoolmaster stood up before them and said a short prayer. Then they sang; the schoolmaster led in a strong bass, all the children standing with folded hands and singing with him. Eyvind stood lowest by the door with Marit and looked on; they, too, folded their hands, but they could not sing.

That was his first day at school.

CHAPTER III

EYVIND grew and became an active boy: at school he was amongst the first, and he was capable at his work at home. That was because at home he was fond of his mother and at school he was fond of his master. His father he saw but little, for he was either away fishing or else he was looking after their mill, where half the parish had their grinding done.

The thing which most influenced his mind during these years was the schoolmaster's history, which his mother told him one evening as they sat by the fire. It ran through all his books, it underlay every word the schoolmaster said; he felt it in the air of the schoolroom when all was quiet. It filled him with obedience and respect, and gave him a quicker apprehension, as it were, of all that was taught him. This was the story:

A HAPPY BOY

Baard was the schoolmaster's name and he had a brother called Anders. They were very fond of each other ; both enlisted, lived in town together, and were together in the war, when they both became corporals and served in the same company. When, after the war, they came home again, everybody thought them two stalwart fellows. Then their father died. He had a good deal of loose property which was difficult to divide evenly, so they said to each other that they would not fall out about it, but would put up the things to auction so that each could buy what he wished and then they would share the proceeds. So said so done. But their father possessed a large gold watch which was widely renowned, for it was the only gold watch people in those parts had ever seen. When this watch was put up many rich people tried for it, until the brothers, too, began to bid ; then the others gave way. Now Baard expected Anders to let him get the watch, and Anders expected the same of Baard ; each made his bid in turn to prove the other, and they

A HAPPY BOY

looked across at each other whilst they bid. When the watch had got up to twenty dollars Baard felt it was not nice of his brother to bid against him, and kept on bidding until it got towards thirty dollars. As Anders still did not give in, it seemed to Baard that Anders neither remembered how good he had been to him, nor yet that he was the eldest. The watch got over thirty dollars, and Anders still kept on. Then Baard ran the watch up to forty dollars in one bid, and no longer looked at his brother. It was very quiet in the auction-room ; only the bailiff quietly repeated the figures. Anders thought as he stood there that if Baard could afford to give forty dollars he could too, and if Baard grudged him the watch he would have to take it ; so out-bid him. This seemed to Baard the greatest slight that had ever been put upon him ; he bid fifty dollars, quite softly. A great many people were standing round, and Anders thought he must not let his brother thus put him to shame in everybody's hearing, so he bid over him. Then Baard laughed : " A hun-

A HAPPY BOY

dred dollars and my brotherhood into the bargain," said he ; turned, and went out of the room. Some one presently came out to him whilst he was busy saddling the horse he had bought just before.

"The watch is yours," said the man ; "Anders gave in."

The moment Baard heard this a sort of remorse fell upon him ; he thought of his brother and not of the watch. The saddle was on, but he paused with his hand on the horse's back, uncertain whether he should start. Then a lot of people came out, Anders amongst them ; and so soon as he saw his brother standing there by the saddled horse, not knowing what was in Baard's mind, he called out to him :

"Much good may the watch do you, Baard ! It won't be going on the day when your brother runs after you any more."

"Nor yet on the day when I ride home again," answered Baard, with a white face, as he mounted his horse. The house in which they had lived with their father, neither of them entered again.

A HAPPY BOY

Soon after, Anders married and settled as a cottar-tenant, but did not invite Baard to the wedding. Baard was not at church either.

In the first year of Ander's marriage the only cow he possessed was found dead by the north wall of the house, where it was tethered; and nobody could make out what it had died of. Several misfortunes followed, and he went down in the world; but the worst was when in mid-winter his barn was burnt with all that was in it; nobody knew how the fire broke out.

"Somebody that hates me has done this," said Anders, and he wept that night. He became a poor man and lost all heart for work.

Next evening Baard stood in his room, Anders was lying on the bed when he entered, but he jumped up.

"What do you want here?" he asked, but stopped short and stood looking fixedly at his brother. Baard waited a little before he answered:

"I want to help you, Anders; the luck's been against you."

A HAPPY BOY

"The luck's been as you wished it to be, Baard. Go, or I mayn't be able to keep my hands off you."

"You are mistaken, Anders; I'm sorry——"

"Go Baard, or God help both you and me!"

Baard drew back a pace or two; with a quivering voice he said:

"If you'll take the watch, you shall have it."

"Go, Baard!" shouted the other, and Baard went.

With Baard things had gone in this wise. So soon as he heard that his brother was in distress his heart melted towards him, but pride kept him back. He felt himself much drawn towards the church, and there he formed good resolutions, but he had not the strength to carry them out. He often set forth and came within sight of the house, but now some one came out of the door, now there was a stranger there, or Anders was out chopping wood; so that there was always something in the way. One Sunday in midwinter, however, he was once more at

A HAPPY BOY

church and Anders was there too. Baard saw him ; he had grown pale and thin, he wore the same clothes as when they were together, but now they were old and ragged. During the sermon he looked up at the pastor, and it seemed to Baard that he was kind and gentle. He remembered their childhood and what a good boy he was. Baard himself took the Sacrament that day, and he made the solemn promise before his God that, come what might, he would be reconciled to his brother. This purpose penetrated his soul just as he drank the wine, and when he rose he intended to go straight over and sit down beside him, but some one was sitting in the way and his brother did not look up. After service there were still difficulties : there were too many people about ; his brother's wife was walking by his side and he did not know her. He thought it would be best to go to his house and have a serious talk with him. When evening came he did so. He went right up to the door and listened, but then he heard his own name mentioned. It was the woman who spoke.

A HAPPY BOY

"He took the Sacrament to-day," said she.
"I daresay he was thinking of you."

"No, he wasn't thinking of me," said Anders.
"I know him ; he thinks only of himself."

For a long time nothing more was said. Baard perspired as he stood there, although it was a cold evening. The woman inside was busy over a pot that bubbled and hissed on the fire, an infant cried now and then, and Anders rocked the cradle.

Then she said these words :

"I believe you two are always thinking of each other and won't own to it."

"Let us talk of something else," answered Anders. He rose soon after to go to the door. Baard had to hide himself in the woodshed, and Anders came to that very place to fetch an armful of wood. Baard stood in the corner and saw him distinctly ; he had taken off his wretched church-clothes and had on the uniform in which he had come home from the war, just like Baard's. The brothers had promised each other never to wear these uniforms, but to leave

them as heirlooms in the family. Anders' was now patched and worn out, his strong, well-developed body appeared as if wrapped in a bundle of rags, and just then Baard could hear the gold watch ticking in his own pocket. Anders went to the place where the faggots lay ; instead of immediately stooping to load himself, he stopped, leaned back against a pile of wood and looked out at the sky, which was clear and glittering with stars. Then he heaved a sigh and said :

“ Well—well—well—my God, my God ! ”
As long as Baard lived he heard those words. He wanted to step forward and greet him, but just then Anders coughed and it sounded so harsh. That was enough to check him. Anders took his armful of wood and brushed by Baard so closely that the twigs scratched his face and made it smart.

He stood motionless on the same spot for quite ten minutes, and might have stood much longer had it not been that after so much strong emotion he was seized with a shivering fit that

A HAPPY BOY

shook him from head to foot. Then he went out: he acknowledged frankly to himself that he was too cowardly to go in, so he now formed another plan. Out of a cinder-box which stood in the corner he had just left, he took some pieces of coal, found a splinter of resinous wood, went up into the barn, closed the door after him and struck a light. When he had got the wood lighted he looked for the peg upon which Anders hung his lantern when he came out in the early morning to thresh. Baard took off his gold watch and hung it on the peg, then extinguished his splinter and went away. He felt his heart so lightened that he ran over the snow like a young boy.

The next day he heard that the barn had been burned down in the night. Sparks had probably fallen from the splinter which he had lighted that he might see to hang up the watch.

This so overpowered him that all that day he sat like a sick person, took down his psalm-book and sang, so that the people in the house

A HAPPY BOY

thought there must be something wrong with him. But in the evening he went out ; it was bright moonlight, He went to his brother's farm, poked about on the site of the fire—and found, sure enough, a little lump of gold. It was the watch, melted down.

With this in his hand he went in to his brother that evening and besought him to make peace. What came of this attempt has already been related.

A little girl had seen him scraping among the ashes on the site of the fire ; some boys, on their way to a dance, had noticed him on the Sunday evening going down towards Anders' farm ; the people at home had told how strangely he had behaved on the Monday ; and as everyone knew that he and his brother were bitter enemies, the matter was reported to the authorities and an inquiry set on foot. No one could prove anything against him, but suspicion clung to him. Reconciliation with his brother was now more impossible than ever.

Anders had thought of Baard when the barn

A HAPPY BOY

was burnt, but had said so to no one. When, on the following evening, he saw him in his room, so white and strange-looking, he immediately thought :

“Remorse has got hold of him now, but for such a horrible crime against his brother there can be no forgiveness.”

Afterwards he heard how people had seen him go down to the buildings on the evening of the fire, and although nothing was brought to light by the inquiry, he was firmly convinced that Baard was the culprit. They met at the inquiry ; Baard in his good clothes, Anders in his rags. As Anders entered, Baard looked over at him with such beseeching eyes that Anders felt the look in his very marrow.

“He wants me to say nothing,” thought Anders, and when he was asked whether he believed his brother had done the deed he said loudly and distinctly :

“No.”

But Anders took to drink from that day, and soon fell into a bad way. Baard suffered still

more, although he did not drink. One would not have known him for the same man.

At last, late one evening, a poor woman came into the little room in which Baard lodged, and asked him to come out a little way with her. He knew it was his brother's wife. Baard at once understood upon what errand she had come; he turned as white as death, put on his things, and went with her without speaking a word. A faint glimmer of light came from Anders' window, and they made for the gleam; for there was no path over the snow. When Baard stood once more in the passage he was met by a strange odour, which turned him sick. They went in. A little child was sitting on the hearth eating coal; its face was black all over, but it looked up, and laughed with white teeth. It was his brother's child. In the bed, with all kinds of clothes over him, lay Anders, wasted, with high, transparent forehead, looking with hollow eyes at his brother. Baard's knees trembled beneath him; he sat down on the foot of the bed and burst into a violent fit of weeping.

A HAPPY BOY

The sick man looked at him immovably and was silent. At last he told his wife to go out, but Baard motioned her to stay,—and now the two brothers began to talk together. They explained themselves from the day of their bidding for the watch right down to the moment of their present meeting. Baard concluded by taking out the lump of gold which he always carried about him, and each now confessed to the other that in all these years he had not felt happy for a single day. Anders did not say much for he was not able, but Baard sat at his bedside all through his illness.

“Now I am quite well,” said Anders one morning when he woke, “now, my dear brother, we will live long together and never part, as in the old days.”

But that day he died.

Baard took his wife and child home with him, and from that day forward they wanted for nothing.

What the brothers had said to each other as Baard sat by the bed made its way out through the walls and the night, and became known to

A HAPPY BOY

every one in the village, and no one was more highly esteemed than Baard. Every one paid respect to him as they would to one who has had great sorrow and found joy again, or as to one who has been long absent. Baard was comforted by the friendliness which surrounded him, and devoted himself to the service of God. He wanted some occupation, he said, and so the old corporal took to teaching school. What he instilled into the children first and last was love ; and he practised it himself, so that the little ones were devoted to him as a playfellow and father all in one.

This, then, was the story of the old schoolmaster, and it took such a hold on Eyvind's mind that it became to him at once a religion and an education. The schoolmaster appeared to him almost a supernatural being, although he sat there so sociably and pretended to scold them. Not to know a lesson for him was impossible, and if he got a smile or a pat on the head after saying it he felt a glow of happiness for a whole day.

A HAPPY BOY

It always made the deepest impression on the children when the schoolmaster, before singing, would make a little speech; and at least once every week he used to read them a few verses about brotherly love. When he read the first of these verses there was always a quiver in his voice, although he had read it again and again for twenty or thirty years; it ran thus:

Love thy neighbour, Christian leal,
Tread him not with iron heel
If in dust he lies.
All things living join to prove
The creative power of love
When a pure heart tries.

But when the whole poem was finished and he had paused a moment after it, he would look at them with a twinkle in his eyes:

“Up with you, youngsters, and get you home nicely without any noise—walk nicely so that I may hear nothing but good accounts of you, little people!”

And then, while they were making a very Babel in searching for their books and dinner-boxes, he would cry above the uproar:

A HAPPY BOY

"Come back again to-morrow as soon as it's light, or you'll catch it! Come back in good time little girls and boys, then we'll go to work with a will!"

CHAPTER IV

OF Eyvind's further development up to a year before his confirmation there is not much to tell. He read in the morning, worked in the day, and played in the evening.

As he was of an unusually cheerful disposition, it was not long before the young people of the neighbourhood, in their playtime, were glad to be where he was. A long hill ran down to the cove in front of the farm, skirting the rock on the one side and the wood on the other, as already related; every fine evening and every Sunday, all the winter through, this was the chosen toboggan-slope of all the young sledgers of the village.

Eyvind was lord of the slope and owned two sledges "Spanker" and "Galloper;" the latter he lent to larger parties, the former he steered

A HAPPY BOY

himself with Marit on his lap. At this season, the first thing Eyvind did when he woke was to look out and see whether it was thawing; and if he saw a grey veil lying over the bushes on the other side of the cove, or if he heard the roof dripping, he was as slow over his dressing as if there was nothing to do that day. But if he awoke, especially on Sundays, to crackling cold and clear weather, best clothes and no work, only catechism or church in the forenoon, and then the whole afternoon and evening free, hurrah! then the boy jumped out of bed with one bound, dressed as if the house were on fire, and could scarcely eat any breakfast. The moment it was afternoon and the first boy came on his snow-shoes along the roadside, swinging his staff over his head and shouting so that the hills around the lake rang again, and then one came down the road on his sledge and then another and another—straightway off shot the boy on his "Spanker" down the whole length of the slope, landing amongst the late comers with a long, shrill shout, which was re-echoed from ridge

to ridge along the cove, until it died away in the far distance. He would then look round for Marit, but when once she had come, he troubled no more about her.

Then one Christmas came when the boy and the girl were both about sixteen or seventeen and were to be confirmed in the spring. On the fourth day of Christmas week there was a big party at the Upper Hill Farm where Marit lived with her grandparents, who had brought her up. They had promised her this party every year for three years, and at last, these holidays, they had to fulfil their promise. Eyvind was invited.

It was a cloudy evening, not cold; no stars were to be seen; the morrow might bring rain. A drowsy breeze blew over the snow, which was swept clear in patches on the white uplands, while in other places it had formed deep drifts. Along by the roadside where no snow happened to lie there was a margin of slippery ice; it lay blue-black between the snow and the bare ground, and could be seen glimmering here and there as

far as the eye could reach. On the mountain-sides there had been snow-slips; their tracks were black and bare, while on each side of them the snow lay smooth and white, except where the birch-trees clustered together in dark patches. There was no water to be seen, but half-naked moors and bogs stretched up to riven and lowering mountains.

The farms lay in large clusters in the midst of the level ground; in the dusk of the winter evening they looked like black masses from which light shot forth over the fields, now from one window, now from another; to judge by the lights there was a great deal going on inside. Young people, grown-up and half-grown up, flocked together from various quarters. Very few kept to the road; almost all, at any rate, left it when they drew near the farms, and slipped away, one behind the cowhouse, a pair under the store-house and so forth; while some rushed away behind the barn and howled like foxes, others answered farther off like cats. One stood behind the wash-house and barked

like an old angry dog, who had broken his chain, until there was a general chase. The girls came marching along in large bands; they had a few boys, mostly little boys, with them, who skirmished around them to show off. When one of the gangs of girls came near the house and one or other of the big boys caught sight of them, the girls scattered and fled into the passages or down the garden, and had to be dragged out and into the rooms one by one. Some were so extremely bashful that Marit had to be sent for, when she would come out and positively force them in. Sometimes one would come who had not been invited and whose intention it was not to go in, but only to look on, until in the end she would be persuaded just to have one single dance. Those guests whom she really cared for, Marit invited into a little room where the old people sat and smoked and grandmother did the honours; there they were kindly received and treated. Eyvind was not amongst the favoured ones, and he thought that rather strange.

A HAPPY BOY

The best player of the village could not come till late, so they had meanwhile to manage with the old one, a cottager called Grey Knut. He knew four dances, two spring-dances, a halling* and an old, so-called Napoleon waltz; but he had been obliged gradually to turn the halling into a shottische by taking it in different time; and in the same way a spring-dance had to do duty as a polka-mazurka. He struck up, and the dancing began. Eyvind did not dare to join in at first, for there were too many grown-up people; but the half-grown ones soon banded together, pushed each other forward, drank a little strong ale to hearten them, and then Eyvind also joined in. The room grew very hot, the fun and the ale mounted to their heads.

Marit danced more than any one else that evening, probably because the party was in her grandparents' house, and so it happened that Eyvind often caught her eye, but she always

* The "spring-dance" and "halling" are characteristic peasant dances.

danced with some one else. He wanted to dance with her himself, so he sat out one dance in order to run to her directly it ended, and this he did ; but a tall, swarthy fellow with bushy hair pushed in front of him.

"Get away, youngster!" cried he and gave Eyvind a shove, so that he nearly fell backwards over Marit. Never had such a thing happened to him, never had any one been other than kind to him, never had he been called "youngster" when he wanted to join in anything. He reddened to the roots of his hair, but said nothing, and drew back to where the new musician, just arrived, had taken his seat and was tuning up. There was silence amongst the crowd ; they were waiting to hear the first loud note from "the right man." He tuned and tried for a long time, but at length he struck up a spring-dance, the boys shouted and hopped, and pair by pair whirled into the circle. Eyvind looked at Marit dancing with the bushy-haired man, she laughed over the man's shoulder so that her white teeth showed, and Eyvind, for the first

A HAPPY BOY

time in his life, was aware of a strange, tingling pain in his breast.

He looked at her again and again, and the more he looked the clearer it seemed to him that Marit was quite grown-up.

"But it can't be so," thought he, "for she still goes sledging with us."

Grown-up she was though, and the bushy-haired man drew her down upon his lap after the dance was over; she broke loose from him, but remained sitting at his side.

Eyvind looked at the man. He had on fine blue Sunday clothes, a blue-checked shirt and silk cravat. He had a small face, bold, blue eyes, a laughing, defiant mouth; he was handsome. Eyvind looked again and again, and at last he looked also at himself. He had got new trousers at Christmas, of which he was very proud, but now he saw that they were only grey frieze; his jacket was of the same stuff, but old and soiled, the knitted waistcoat of common yarn, lozenge-pattern, also old and with two bright buttons and one black one. He

A HAPPY BOY

looked around him and thought that very few were so poorly dressed as he. Marit had on a black bodice of fine stuff, a silver brooch in her neckerchief and a folded silk handkerchief in her hand. On the back of her head she wore a little silk cap which was fastened under her chin with long ribbons. She was red and white; she laughed; the man talked with her and laughed too. Again the music struck up and again they stood up to dance. A comrade came and sat beside him.

"Why aren't you dancing, Eyvind?" said he, gently.

"Oh, no," said Eyvind, "do I look like it?"

"Look like it," said his comrade, but before he could get further Eyvind said:

"Who is that in the blue clothes, dancing with Marit?"

"That's John Hatlen, who's been away so long at the agricultural college; he's going to take the farm now."

At that moment Marit and John sat down.

"Who is that fair-haired boy sitting there

A HAPPY BOY

beside the fiddler and staring at me?" asked John.

Marit laughed and answered:

"That's the cottar's son, down at the croft."

Of course Eyvind had always known he was a cottar's son, but until now he had never felt it. He had a feeling as though his body had suddenly shrunk and he was shorter than all the others. To keep himself in heart, he had to try to think of everything that had hitherto made him happy and proud, from the sledging-times down to single words that had pleased him. As he thought, too, of his mother and father sitting at home and thinking that he was enjoying himself, he could scarcely help bursting into tears. All around him were laughing and joking, the fiddle boomed right in his ear. There came a moment when something black seemed to rise up before him, but then he remembered the school with all his comrades, and the schoolmaster who patted him on the back, and the minister who had given him a

A HAPPY BOY

book at his last examination and said he was a clever boy ; his father himself had sat and looked on and had smiled at him.

"Be good now, Eyvind," he seemed to hear the schoolmaster saying, and he felt as though he were a little boy again, sitting on his lap. "Good heavens, you know, there's nothing to trouble about ; at bottom everybody is good ; it only seems as if they were not. We two will be clever fellows, Eyvind, just as clever as John Hatlen ; we shall get just as good clothes, and dance with Marit in a bright room among hundreds of people, smiling and talking ; then there'll be a bridal pair standing before the minister, and I in the choir smiling across at you, and mother in the house, a big farm, twenty cows, three horses, and Marit good and kind, just as she was at school——"

The dance ended and Eyvind saw Marit before him on a bench, John still by her side with his face close to hers ; once more there came a great tingling pain in his breast, and he seemed to be saying to himself :

A HAPPY BOY

"It's true, after all, I am suffering." At that moment Marit rose and came straight up to him. She bent down over him.

"You mustn't sit and glower at me like that," said she; "can't you see that people are noticing it? Take a partner and dance now."

He made no answer but looked at her, and in spite of himself his eyes filled with tears. She was just turning away when she noticed this and stopped; she suddenly flushed as red as fire, turned away and went to her seat, but immediately rose again and seated herself in another place. John at once followed her.

Eyvind rose from the bench, went out amongst the people in the yard, seated himself under a pent-house roof, then wondered what he was doing there, got up and then sat down again, for might he not as well sit here as anywhere else? He did not care to go home nor yet to go indoors again; it was all one to him. He was in no state to reflect upon what had happened; he did not want to think about it.

A HAPPY BOY

Neither did he care to think of the future; there was nothing that had any attraction for him.

"What am I thinking of, after all?" he asked himself half-aloud, and hearing his own voice he thought :

"So you can still speak—can you laugh?"

He tried: yes, he could laugh; and then he went on laughing, loud, still louder; and then it seemed to him a great joke that he should be sitting there laughing all alone, and that made him laugh again. But his friend Hans, who had been sitting by his side indoors, now followed him out.

"Why, what on earth are you laughing at?" he asked, stopping before the pent-house. Then Eyvind left off.

Hans stood there as if waiting to see what would happen next; Eyvind rose, looked cautiously round and then said softly :

"I'll tell you why I always used to be so happy, Hans; it was because I never really cared for anybody. But from the day we care

A HAPPY BOY

for somebody our happiness is over." And he burst into tears.

"Eyvind!" a voice whispered out in the yard, "Eyvind!" He stopped and listened.

"Eyvind!" repeated the voice once more, a little louder. It must be the person he thought.

"Yes," answered he, also in a whisper, drying his eyes quickly and stepping forward. A girl softly crossed the yard.

"Are you there?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered, and stood still.

"Who is with you?"

"It's Hans." Hans wanted to go.

"No, no!" Eyvind begged of him.

She now came close up to them, but slowly; it was Marit.

"You went away so soon," she said to Eyvind. He did not know what to answer. Thereupon she too became embarrassed; they were all three silent. Hans slipped quietly away and left the two standing there, not looking at each other and not moving. Then she whispered:

A HAPPY BOY

"I've been going about all the evening with some Christmas sweeties in my pocket for you, Eyvind, but I couldn't give them to you before."

She fished up some apples, a slice of town-baked cake and a little half-pint bottle, which she held out to him saying they were for him. Eyvind pocketed them.

"Thanks," he said, holding out his hand; * hers was warm, and he let it go at once as if he had burnt himself.

"You have danced a great deal this evening."

"Yes, I have," she answered, "but you haven't danced much," she added.

"No, I haven't," answered he.

"Why haven't you?"

"Oh——"

"Eyvind!"

"Yes."

"Why did you sit and look at me like that?"

"Oh——" A pause.

* It is the peasant custom to shake hands in thanking for a gift.

A HAPPY BOY

"Marit!"

"Yes."

"Why didn't you like my looking at you?"

"There were such a lot of people there."

"You danced a great deal with John Hatlen this evening."

"Oh yes."

"He dances well."

"Do you think so?"

"Don't you think so?"

"Oh yes."

"I don't know how it is, but this evening I can't bear you to dance with him, Marit." He turned away; it had cost him an effort to say this.

"I don't understand you, Eyvind."

"I don't understand it myself: it's so stupid of me. Good-bye, Marit, I'm going now."

He made a step without looking round. Then she said as he moved away:

"You've been seeing things wrongly to-night, Eyvind."

He stopped.

A HAPPY BOY

"There's one thing I haven't seen wrongly and that is that you're a grown-up girl."

This was not what she expected him to say, so she was silent; and at that moment she saw the light of a pipe right in front of her. It was her grandfather who had just come round the corner and was passing by. He stopped.

"Oh you're here are you, Marit?"

"Yes."

"Who's that you're talking to?"

"Eyvind."

"Who did you say?"

"Eyvind Pladsen."

"Oh, the cottar's boy at Pladsen: come in at once with me."

CHAPTER V

WHEN Eyvind opened his eyes next morning it was from a long, refreshing sleep and happy dreams. Marit had lain on the rock and thrown down leaves at him; he had caught them and thrown them up again; they went up and down in a thousand colours and figures; the sun shone on them, and the whole rock sparkled. As he awoke he looked round, expecting still to see the picture of his dream; then he recollected the previous day, and immediately the same tingling, bitter pain in his breast began again.

"I suppose I shall never be quit of it," thought he, and he felt unstrung, as if his whole future had slipped away from him.

"You've slept a long time," said his mother, who was sitting beside him spinning. "Up

A HAPPY BOY

now, and have something to eat ; your father is off to the wood already, felling timber."

His mother's voice seemed to help him, he got up with a little more courage. No doubt his mother was thinking of her own dancing-days, for she sat humming to herself as she span, whilst he dressed and ate his breakfast. To hide his face from her he had to rise from table and go to the window. The same weariness and oppression had come over him again, and he had to pull himself together and think of setting to work.

The weather had changed, the air had turned a little colder, so that what yesterday threatened to fall as rain, fell to-day as wet snow. He put on snow-socks, a fur cap, a sailor's jacket and mittens, said good-bye, and went off with his axe on his shoulder.

The snow fell slowly in large, wet flakes ; he struggled up the sledging slope, and turning to the left at the top, entered the wood. Never before, winter or summer, had he climbed that hill without remembering something that made

A HAPPY BOY

him happy, or that he longed for. Now it was a dead, heavy tramp ; he slipped in the wet snow ; his knees were stiff either from yesterday's dancing or from his general depression. He felt now that it was all over with sledge-running for that year, and that meant for ever. He longed for something else as he went in amongst the tree-trunks where the snow fell silently ; a scared ptarmigan shrieked and flapped its wings a few yards ahead of him ; otherwise everything stood as though waiting for a word that was never spoken. But what it was that he yearned for he did not distinctly know, only it was not at home, nor yet abroad, it was not merriment nor yet work ; it was something high up in the air, soaring like a song. Presently it resolved itself into a definite wish, and that was to be confirmed in the spring, and to take the first place in the confirmation-class. His heart beat fast as he thought of it, and even before he could hear his father's axe in the trembling underwood, this wish had taken a stronger hold of him than anything since he was born.

A HAPPY BOY

His father, as usual, did not say much to him ; they hewed each by himself and collected the wood into heaps. Now and then they would meet, and on one of these occasions Eyvind remarked gloomily :

“A cottar has a hard time of it.”

“Not worse than other people,” said his father, spitting in his hands and taking up his axe. When the tree was felled and his father dragged it up into the pile, Eyvind said :

“If you had a farm of your own you wouldn't have to toil like that.”

“Oh, then there would be other burdens to bear,” and he tugged with all his strength.

The mother came up with their dinner, and they sat down. The mother was cheerful ; she sat and hummed, keeping time by tapping one shoe against the other.

“What are you going to be, now you're getting big, Eyvind ? ” said she suddenly.

“A cottar's son hasn't much choice,” he answered.

“The schoolmaster says you must go to the training-college,” said she.

"Can you go there for nothing?" asked Eyvind.

"The schoolmaster will pay your fees," said his father, as he ate.

"Would you like to go?" asked his mother.

"I should like to learn, but not to be a schoolmaster."

They were all silent for a moment ; she began humming again and looked straight before her. But Eyvind went off and sat down by himself.

"We don't exactly need to borrow from the school-fund," said she when the boy had gone. Her husband looked at her.

"Poor folks like us?"

"I don't like your constantly giving yourself out for a poor man when you're not one."

They both glanced at the boy to see whether he was within hearing. Then the husband looked sharply at his wife.

"You're talking of what you don't understand." She laughed.

"It's like not thanking God that things have gone well with us," said she, becoming serious.

A HAPPY BOY

"We can surely thank him without putting silver buttons on our coats," said the father.

"Yes, but not by letting Eyvind go as he did to the dance yesterday."

"Eyvind is a cottar's son."

"That's no reason why he shouldn't be decently dressed, since we can afford it."

"That's right—talk so that he can hear."

"He doesn't hear ; but I shouldn't be sorry if he did," said she, looking boldly at her husband who was frowning, and put down his spoon to take up his pipe.

"Such a wretched holding as we have," said he.

"I can't help laughing at you, always talking about the holding. Why do you never say anything about the mills?"

"Oh, you and your mills! I believe you can't bear to hear them going."

"Oh, I love it, thank goodness! I wish they were going night and day."

"They've been standing now since before Christmas."

A HAPPY BOY

"People don't have their corn ground in Christmas week."

"They have it ground whenever there's water; but since they got a mill at Nyström, things have been very slack."

"The schoolmaster didn't say so to-day."

"I shall get a closer fellow than the schoolmaster to manage our money."

"Yes, your own wife is the last person he ought to speak to."

Thore did not answer this, he had just got his pipe lighted; he leant up against a bundle of faggots and shifted his gaze, first from his wife, then from his son, until at last he fixed it upon an old crow's nest which hung all askew on a fir-branch a little way off.

Eyvind sat by himself, with the future stretching before him like a long, clear sheet of ice, over which, for the first time, he let his fancy sweep him away from the one shore right to the other. He felt that poverty barred the way on all sides, but for that very reason all his thoughts were bent upon overcoming it. From

A HAPPY BOY

Marit it had no doubt parted him for ever ; he regarded her as almost promised to John Hatlen ; but his whole mind was set upon making life a race with him and her. In order not to be elbowed aside again as he was yesterday, he would hold aloof until he had made his way ; and that, with God's help, he would make his way, it never entered his head to doubt. He had a dim feeling that his best plan was to stick to his books ; to what end they should lead he must find out later.

The snow was fit for sledging in the evening, the children came to the slope, but not Eyvind. He sat by the fire and read, and had not a moment to spare. The children waited for a long time ; at last some of them got impatient, came up and put their faces against the window-panes and called in, but he made as though he did not hear. Others came, and evening after evening they hung about outside in great surprise ; but he turned his back on them and read, and fought faithfully to grasp the meaning. He afterwards heard that Marit did not come either.

He studied with such diligence that even his father could not but think he was overdoing it. He grew very grave ; his face, which had been so round and soft, became thinner, sharper, and his eye harder. He seldom sang, and never played ; he never seemed to have time enough. When temptation came upon him, it seemed as though some one whispered : " By-and-by, by-and-by ! " and always " by-and-by ! " For some time the children ran on their snow shoes, and shouted and laughed as before, but as they could not tempt him out to them either by the merry sounds of their sledging or by calling in to him with their faces against the window, they gradually kept away ; they found other playgrounds, and soon the slope was deserted.

But the schoolmaster soon noticed that it was not the old Eyvind who learnt his lessons as a matter of course, and played as a matter of necessity. He often talked with him and tried to draw him out ; but he could not get at the boy's heart so easily as in the old days. He also talked to his parents, and, having taken

A HAPPY BOY

counsel with them, he came down one Sunday evening late in the winter and said, when he had sat for some time :

“Come along, Eyvind, let us go out a little ; I want to have a talk with you.”

Eyvind put on his things and went with him. They happened to take the direction of the Hill Farms, conversing freely on indifferent subjects. When they drew near the farms, the schoolmaster turned off towards one which lay in the middle, and as they advanced they heard shouts and sounds of merriment proceeding from it.

“What’s going on here ? ” asked Eyvind.

“A dance,” said the schoolmaster, “shall we not go in ? ”

“No.”

“Won’t you join in a dance, my boy ? ”

“No, not yet.”

“Not yet ? When, then ? ”

He did not answer.

“What do you mean by *yet* ? ”

As the boy still made no answer the schoolmaster said :

A HAPPY BOY

"Come now, no nonsense."

"No, I'm not going in!"

He was very determined and agitated besides.

"Strange that your old schoolmaster should have to stand here and entreat you to go to a dance!"

There was a long silence.

"Is there some one in there whom you're afraid to see?"

"How should I know who is there?"

"But there *might* be some one?"

Eyvind was silent.

Then the schoolmaster went close up to him and laid his hand on his shoulder.

"Are you afraid of seeing Marit?"

Eyvind looked to the ground, and his breathing became heavy and short.

"Tell me, Eyvind."

Eyvind was silent.

"I daresay you don't like to own it, since you're not confirmed; but tell me all the same, my dear Eyvind, and you sha'n't repent it."

Eyvind looked up, but could not get out a word, and had to look away again.

A HAPPY BOY

"I could see you hadn't been happy lately ; does she care more for others than for you ? "

As Eyvind did not answer even now, the schoolmaster felt rather hurt and turned from him. They walked homewards.

When they had gone a good way, the schoolmaster stopped to let Eyvind overtake him.

"I suppose you're longing to be confirmed," said he.

"Yes."

"What do you mean to do afterwards ? "

"I should like to go to the training-college."

"And be a schoolmaster ? "

"No."

"You're above that, eh ? "

Eyvind was silent. They again went on a good way.

"When you've been to the training-college, what then ? "

"I haven't really thought about that."

"If you had money I suppose you'd like to buy a farm ? "

"Yes, but keep the mills."

A HAPPY BOY

"Then it would be better for you to go to the School of Agriculture."

"Do they learn as much there as at the training-college?"

"Oh no, but they learn what's going to be of use to them afterwards."

"Can you take honours there, too?"

"Why do you ask?"

"I should like to learn things thoroughly."

"That you can do without taking honours."

They walked on again in silence till they saw Pladsen; a light shone out from the sitting-room, the rock loomed darkly in the winter night, the lake lay below covered with smooth, sparkling ice, the wood, with no snow on it, encircled the still cove; the moon shone out and mirrored the wood in the ice.

"It is beautiful here at Pladsen," said the schoolmaster. Eyvind could sometimes see it with the same eyes as when his mother told fairy-tales, or with the vision he had when he raced down the hill on his sledge: so he saw it now; everything seemed elevated and clear.

A HAPPY BOY

"Yes, it is beautiful here," he said, but sighed as he spoke.

"Your father has been contented with the holding; couldn't you be contented here too?"

The happy vision of the place all at once vanished. The schoolmaster stood as though waiting for an answer; receiving none, he shook his head, and they went indoors. He sat there awhile with them, but had very little to say, so that the others became silent too. When he said good-bye, both husband and wife went outside the door with him; they seemed to expect him to say something. Meanwhile they all three stood looking up at the evening sky.

"It seems so unnaturally quiet here," said the mother at length, "since the children have gone elsewhere to play."

"And ~~you~~ have no longer a *child* in the house," said the schoolmaster.

The mother understood what he meant.

"Eyvind is not happy of late," said she.

"Oh no, he who is ambitious is not happy."

He looked with an old man's peace up into God's silent sky.

CHAPTER VI

Six months later, that is to say in the autumn (the confirmation had been put off till then), the candidates for confirmation sat in the servants' hall of the minister's house waiting to be called in for examination, and amongst them Eyvind of Pladsen and Marit of the Hill Farms. Marit had just come down from the minister's room where she had received a beautiful book and much commendation. She laughed and chatted with her girl-friends on all sides, and looked round amongst the boys. Marit was now a full-grown girl, light and free in all her movements, and the boys as well as the girls knew that the finest bachelor of the village, John Hatlen, was paying court to her; she might well be happy as she sat there. By the door stood some girls and boys who had not passed; they were crying

A HAPPY BOY

whilst Marit and her friends laughed. Amongst them was a little boy in his father's boots and his mother's Sunday kerchief.

"Oh God, oh God!" he sobbed, "I daren't go home again."

This seized those who had not yet been up, with the force of fellow-feeling; there was a general silence. Anxiety clouded their eyes and gripped them by the throat; they could not see distinctly, and neither could they swallow, though they constantly wanted to. One sat and went over all he knew, and though he had discovered some hours before that he knew everything, he now found out with equal certainty that he knew nothing—could not even read. A second went over his whole list of sins, from as far back as he could remember, till now, and came to the conclusion that it would not be in the least wonderful if Our Lord did not let him pass. A third sat and watched everything in the room: if the clock, which was on the point of striking, did not begin until he had counted twenty, he would pass; if the person

A HAPPY BOY

he heard coming into the passage was the stable-boy, Lars, he would pass ; if the big raindrop that was creeping down the window came right to the frame, he would pass. The last and decisive proof was to be whether he could get his right foot twisted round his left, and this he found quite impossible. A fourth was sure that if he was questioned on Joseph in history and on baptism in doctrine, or on Saul, or on the Decalogue, or on Jesus or—he was still going over it all when his turn came. A fifth had set his heart on the Sermon on the Mount ; he had dreamt of the sermon, he was sure he would be questioned on the sermon ; he went over the sermon to himself, he had to slip out to read the sermon over again—then his turn came, and he was examined on the major and minor prophets. A sixth thought of the minister, what a kind man he was, and how well he knew his father and mother ; and of the schoolmaster, who had such a gentle face ; and of God, who was so very gracious and had helped many before, both Jacob and Joseph ; and then he thought how his

A HAPPY BOY

mother and sisters were at home praying for him, and that was sure to help. The seventh sat and knocked down all the castles in the air he had built. First he had determined to become a king, then a general or a minister—that stage had long been past: but until he had entered this room he had still thought of going to sea and becoming a captain, perhaps a pirate, and amassing enormous wealth: then he gave up the idea of riches, then the idea of becoming a pirate, then of becoming a captain, then of becoming a mate; he stopped at common sailor or at highest boatswain—it was even possible that he would not go to sea at all, but set to work on his father's farm. The eighth was a little more confident, yet not quite sure of passing; for not even the cleverest could be *quite* sure. He thought of the clothes he had got to be confirmed in, and what they would be used for if he didn't pass. But if he passed he was to go to town and get splendid Sunday clothes, and come home again and dance at Christmas, to the envy of all the boys and the admiration of

A HAPPY BOY

all the girls. The ninth reckoned otherwise; he opened a little account with God in which he placed upon the one side as Debit: 'He will allow me to pass,' and on the other side as Credit: 'I will never tell any more lies, nor gossip, will always go to church, let the girls alone, and break myself of swearing.' But the tenth thought that as Ole Hansen had passed last year, it would be worse than injustice if he did not pass this year, for he had always been above him at school, and besides, his parents were more respectable. At his side sat the eleventh, nursing the most bloodthirsty plans for revenge in case he did not pass—he was going either to set fire to the school, or leave the neighbourhood and come back as a fulminating judge to call the minister and the whole school-commission to account, and then magnanimously let mercy stand for justice. As a beginning he would go into service with the minister of the next parish, and there be first in the examination next year, and answer so that the whole church should wonder and admire. But the twelfth sat

A HAPPY BOY

by himself underneath the clock, with both hands in his pockets, and looked sorrowfully at the rest. No one knew what a burden he bore and what anxiety was racking him. But at home there was one who knew it—for he was betrothed. A big, long-legged spider crept over the floor and came near his foot : he used always to tread upon the ugly insects, but to-day he lifted his foot tenderly and let it pass in peace. His voice was as mild as a collect ; his eyes kept on repeating that all men were good ; his hand moved humbly from his pocket to his hair, in order to smooth it down. If he could only wriggle by hook or by crook through this terrible needle's eye, he would soon swell out again on the other side, chew tobacco and make his engagement public. On a low stool, with his legs bent underneath him, sat the restless thirteenth ; his small sparkling eyes made the round of the room three times in a second : and inside the strong, rough head the thoughts of all the other twelve were tossing about in wild confusion, from the brightest hope to the darkest despair, from

the humblest resolves to the most annihilating plans of vengeance ; and meanwhile he had eaten up all the loose skin from his right thumb and was now busy with his nails, of which he scattered great fragments on the floor.

Eyvind sat over by the window ; he had been up and answered everything he was asked, but the minister had said nothing nor the schoolmaster either. He had been thinking for more than six months what both would say when they came to know how he had worked, and he now felt disappointed, and hurt withal. There sat Marit who, for far less labour and knowledge, had received both encouragement and reward. It was precisely for the sake of shining in her eyes that he had toiled, and now she laughingly enjoyed all that he had worked for with so much self-renunciation. Her laughter and joking burnt into his soul, the freedom with which she carried herself hurt him. He had sedulously avoided speaking to her since that evening ; "I won't for years yet," he thought ; but the sight of her sitting there, so gay and

A HAPPY BOY

at her ease, crushed him to the earth, and all his proud projects drooped like leaves in the rain.

Little by little, however, he tried to shake off the depression. The thing was to know whether he was Number One to-day, and for this he waited. The schoolmaster generally remained a little while in the minister's room to arrange the young folks in order, and then came down to announce the result ; not the final order, indeed, but that which the minister and himself had provisionally agreed upon. Conversation in the room became livelier by degrees, as more and more were examined and passed. But now it became easy to distinguish the ambitious from the contented ones ; the latter, so soon as they could get company on the way, went off to tell their parents of their good luck, or else waited for others who had not yet been examined ; the former, on the contrary, became quieter and quieter, straining their eyes towards the door.

At length all had been examined, the last had come down, and the schoolmaster was now con-

sulting with the minister. Eyvind looked at Marit ; she seemed quite indifferent, but remained sitting, whether on her own or on some one else's account, he did not know. How lovely Marit had grown ! He had never seen such a dazzlingly soft complexion ; her nose turned up a little, her mouth was smiling. Her eyes were half-closed when she did not just happen to be looking at you, but that gave her glance an unexpected brilliance when it came—and, as it to explain that she meant nothing by it, she would half smile at the same time. Her hair was rather dark than fair, but it curled in little ringlets and came far forward at the sides—so that together with her half-closed eyes it gave her face an effect of mystery which it seemed one could never quite fathom. It was impossible to tell exactly at whom she was looking when she sat by herself or among others, or what she was really thinking of when she turned and talked to any one—for she seemed immediately to take back what she gave.

“No doubt John Hatlen is lurking under all

A HAPPY BOY

this," thought Eyvind ; but still he kept on looking at her.

Now the schoolmaster came. They all started from their seats and crowded round him.

"What's my number ? "

"And mine ? "

"And mine, mine ? "

"Hush you overgrown children, no noise here ; be quiet boys, and you shall hear."

He looked slowly round.

"You are Number Two," said he to a boy with blue eyes who was looking beseechingly at him, and the boy danced out of the ring.

"You are Number Three," and he gave a little slap to a red-haired, active little fellow who stood pulling his coat.

"You are Number Five, you Number Eight," and so on. He caught sight of Marit.

"You are Number One of the girls." She flushed crimson all over her face and neck, but tried to smile.

"You, Number Twelve, have been lazy, you rascal, and a great vagabond ; you Number

A HAPPY BOY

Eleven couldn't expect anything better, my boy; you, Number Thirteen, must study hard and come to the repetition class, else you'll come off badly."

Eyvind could bear it no longer; it was true Number One had not been mentioned, but he was standing the whole time where the schoolmaster could see him.

"Master!"—he did not hear. "Master!" He had to repeat it three times before he was heard. At last the schoolmaster looked at him.

"Number Nine or Ten, I don't exactly remember which," said he, and turned to the others.

"Who is Number One then?" asked Hans, who was Eyvind's great friend.

"Not you, curly pate!" said the schoolmaster, hitting him over the knuckles with a roll of paper.

"Who is it then?" asked several. "Who is it—yes, who is it?"

"The one who has the number will be told of it," answered the schoolmaster, severely; he would have no more questions.

A HAPPY BOY

"Go home nicely now, children, thank your God and gladden your parents! Thank your old schoolmaster too; you would have been badly enough off without him!"

They thanked him and laughed, they dispersed rejoicing, for at this moment when they were to go home to their parents they were all happy. But one there was who could not immediately find his books and who, when he did find them, sat down as if to con them all over again.

The schoolmaster went up to him.

"Well, Eyvind, aren't you going with the others?"

He did not answer.

"What are you looking up in your books?"

"I want to see what I have answered wrong to-day."

"I don't think you answered anything wrong."

Then Eyvind looked at him, the tears in his eyes; he looked fixedly at him whilst one tear after another ran down, but he said

A HAPPY BOY

not a word. The schoolmaster sat down in front of him.

"Are you not glad now that you've passed?"

His mouth quivered but he did not answer.

"Your father and mother will be very much pleased," said the schoolmaster looking at him.

Eyvind struggled a long time to get a word out, at last he asked him, speaking low and in broken phrases :

"Is it—because I—am a cottar's son—that I am Number Nine or Ten?"

"No doubt it is," answered the schoolmaster.

"Then it's no good for me to work," said he in a dead voice, crushed under the wreck of his dreams. Suddenly he raised his head, lifted his right hand, struck the table with all his might, flung himself on his face and burst into an agony of weeping.

The schoolmaster let him lie and have his cry right out. It lasted a long time, but the schoolmaster waited until the weeping became more like that of a child. Then he took the boy's

A HAPPY BOY

head between his hands, lifted it up and looked into the tear-stained face.

"Do you think it is God who has been with you now?" said he, putting his arm tenderly round his shoulders.

Eyvind was still sobbing, but not so violently; the tears flowed more slowly, but he did not dare to look at his questioner, nor yet to answer.

"This, Eyvind, has been your just reward. You have not studied for the love of heaven and your parents; you have studied for vanity's sake."

It was all silent in the room in the intervals of the schoolmaster's speaking. Eyvind felt his gaze resting on him and he was melted and humbled by it.

"With such anger in your heart you could not have presented yourself to make a covenant with your God; could you, Eyvind?"

"No," he stammered as well as he could.

"And if you stood there in vainglorious joy because you were Number One, would you not be bringing sin to the altar?"

A HAPPY BOY

"Yes," whispered he, with trembling lips.

"You still love me, Eyvind?"

"Yes;" and he looked up for the first time.

"Then I will tell you that it was I who got you placed lower; for I love you so much, Eyvind!"

The other looked at him, blinked several times, and the tears rained down thickly.

"You don't bear me a grudge for it?"

"No." He looked up fully and clearly although he was nearly choked.

"My dear child! I will take care of you as long as I live."

The schoolmaster waited for him until he had pulled himself together and arranged his books, and then said he would go home with him. They walked slowly homewards; at first Eyvind was still silent and struggling with himself, but gradually he got into a better frame of mind. He felt quite sure that what had happened was for the best, and before they reached home his conviction had become so strong that he thanked God and told the schoolmaster.

A HAPPY BOY

"Ah, now we can think about doing something in life," said the schoolmaster, "and not run after nothings and numbers. What do you say to the seminary?"

"Yes, I should like to go there."

"You mean the Agricultural College?"

"Yes."

"That's certainly the best; it offers better prospects than schoolmastering."

"But how shall I get there? I want so much to go, but I've no money."

"Be industrious and good and we shall find means."

Eyvind was quite overcome with gratitude. He had that sparkle of the eye, that lightness of breath, that infinite fire of love which comes over one when one feels the unexpected goodness of a human creature. The whole future presents itself for a moment like wandering in the fresh mountain air; one seems to be wafted forward without effort.

When they got home, both parents were in the room where they had been sitting in silent ex-

pectation, although it was working-time and they were busy. The schoolmaster went in first Eyvind followed; both were smiling.

"Well?" said the father, laying down a hymn book in which he had just been reading "A Communicant's Prayer." The mother stood by the fireplace and dared not speak: she laughed but her hands were unsteady; she evidently expected good news, but would not betray herself.

"I thought I'd just come with him, for I knew how glad you would be to hear that he answered every question, and that the minister said when Eyvind had gone that he has never had a better-prepared candidate."

"Oh, did he really!" said his mother, much moved.

"That was good," said his father, clearing his throat undecidedly.

After a long silence the mother asked softly:

"What Number will he get?"

"Number Nine or Ten," said the schoolmaster, calmly.

A HAPPY BOY

The mother looked at the father, and he looked first at her and then at Eyvind.

"A cottar's son can expect no more," said he.

Eyvind looked back at him ; he felt as if the tears would rise to his throat again, but he controlled himself by hastily calling to mind things dear to him, one after another, until the impulse subsided.

"I had better go now," said the schoolmaster nodding and turning away. Both parents went out with him as usual to the doorstep ; here the schoolmaster cut a quid of tobacco and said smiling :

"He will be Number One all the same ; but had better not hear of it until the day comes."

"No, no," said his father, nodding.

"No, no," said his mother, nodding too ; then she took the schoolmaster's hand : "You must let us thank you for all you have done for him," said she.

"Yes, we thank you," said the father, and the schoolmaster went away ; but they stood a long time looking after him.

CHAPTER VII

THE schoolmaster had gone on the right track when he advised the minister to put Eyvind's fitness to the test. During the three weeks which elapsed before the confirmation he was with the boy every day. It is one thing for a young and tender soul to receive an impression, and another thing to retain it steadfastly. Many dark hours fell upon the boy before he learnt to take the measure of his future by better standards than those of vanity and display. Every now and then, in the very midst of his work, his pleasure in it would slip away from him. 'To what end?' he would think, 'what shall I gain?' and then a moment afterwards he would remember the schoolmaster's words and his kindness; but he needed this human stand-by to help him up again every time he fell away from the sense of his higher duty.

A HAPPY BOY

During those days preparations were going on at Pladsen not only for the confirmation, but also for Eyvind's departure to the Agricultural College, which was to take place the day after. The tailor and shoemaker were in the house, his mother was baking in the kitchen, his father was making a chest for him. There was a great deal of talk about how much he would cost them in two years; about his not being able to come home the first Christmas, perhaps not even the second; about the love he must feel for his parents who were willing to make such an effort for their child's sake. Eyvind sat there like one who had put out to sea on his own account but had capsized and was now taken up by kindly people.

Such a feeling conduces to humility, and with that comes much besides. As the great day drew near, he ventured to call himself prepared and to look forward with trustful devotion. Every time the image of Marit tried to mingle in his thoughts he put it resolutely aside, but felt pain in doing so. He tried to practise doing this, but never grew stronger; on the contrary,

A HAPPY BOY

it was the pain that grew. He was tired, therefore, the last evening when, after a long self-examination, he prayed that Our Lord might not put him to this test.

The schoolmaster came in as the evening wore on. They gathered in the sitting-room after they had all washed and tidied themselves, according to custom the evening before one is to go to communion. The mother was agitated, the father silent ; parting lay beyond to-morrow's ceremony, and it was uncertain when they would all sit together again. The schoolmaster took out the psalm-books, they had prayers and sang, and afterwards he said a little prayer just as the words occurred to him.

These four persons sat together until the evening grew very late and thought turned inwards upon itself ; then they parted with the best wishes for the coming day and the compact it was to seal. Eyvind had to own as he lay down that never had he gone to bed so happy ; and by that, as he now interpreted it, he meant :
“ Never have I lain down so submissive to God's

A HAPPY BOY

will and so happy in it." Marit's face at once came to haunt him again ; and the last thing he was conscious of was lying there saying to himself : " Not quite happy, not quite," and then answering : " Yes I am, quite," and then again : " Not quite."—" Yes, quite."—" No, not quite."

When he awoke, he immediately remembered the day, said his prayers and felt himself strong, as one does in the morning.

Since the summer, he had slept by himself in the loft ; he now got up and put on his handsome new clothes carefully, for he had never had the like before. There was, in particular, a short jacket which he had to touch a great many times before he got used to it. He got a little mirror when he had put on his collar, and for the fourth time put on his coat. As he now saw his own delighted face, set in extraordinarily fair hair, smiling out at him from the glass, it struck him that this, again, was doubtless vanity. " Well, but people must be well-dressed and clean," answered he, while he drew back from the mirror as though it were a sin to look in it.

A HAPPY BOY

"Certainly, but not quite so happy about it."
"No, but Our Lord must surely be pleased that one should like to look nice." "That may be, but He would like it better if you did so without being so much taken up about it." "That's true, but you see it's because everything is so new." "Yes, but then by degrees you must leave it off." He found himself carrying on such self-examining dialogues in his own mind, now on one subject, now on another, in order that no sin should fall upon the day and stain it, but he knew, too, that more than that was needed.

When he came down, his parents were sitting full-dressed, waiting breakfast for him. He went and shook hands with them and thanked them for the clothes.

"May you have health to wear them." *

They seated themselves at table, said a silent grace, and ate. The mother cleared the table and brought in the provision-box in preparation for church. The father put on his coat, the

* A customary phrase.

A HAPPY BOY

mother pinned her kerchief, they took their hymn-books, locked up the house and set off. When they got upon the upper road they found it thronged with church-going folk, driving and walking, with confirmation candidates amongst them, and in more than one group white-haired grandparents, determined to make this one last appearance.

It was an autumn day without sunshine—such as portends a change of weather. Clouds gathered and parted again, sometimes a great assemblage would break up into twenty smaller ones which rushed away bearing orders for a storm; but down on the earth it was as yet still, the leaves hung lifeless, not even quivering, the air was rather close; the people carried cloaks but did not use them. An unusually large crowd had assembled round the high-lying church, but the young people who were to be confirmed went straight in to be settled in their places before service began. Then it was that the schoolmaster, in blue clothes, tail-coat and knee-breeches, high boots, stiff collar, and

A HAPPY BOY

his pipe sticking out of his tail-pocket, came down the church, nodded and smiled, slapped one on the shoulder, spoke a few words to another, reminding him to answer loud and clear, and so made his way over to the poor-box, where Eyvind stood answering all his friend Hans's questions with reference to his journey.

"Good morning, Eyvind; how fine we are to-day,"—he took him by the coat-collar as if he wanted to speak to him. "Listen; I think all's well with you. I've just been speaking to the minister: you are to take your place, go up to Number One, and answer distinctly!"

Eyvind looked up at him astonished; the schoolmaster nodded, the boy moved a few steps, stopped, a few more steps and stopped again. "Yes, it's really so, he has spoken for me to the minister;" and the boy went up quickly.

"You're Number One after all, then?" someone whispered to him.

"Yes," answered Eyvind, softly, but he still

A HAPPY BOY

was not quite sure whether he dared take his place.

The marshalling was completed, the minister arrived, the bell rang, and the people came streaming in. Then Eyvind saw Marit of the Hill Farms standing just opposite him. She looked at him, too, but both were so impressed by the sacredness of the place that they dared not greet each other. He saw only that she was dazlingly beautiful and was bareheaded; more than that he did not see. Eyvind who, for more than six months, had been nursing such great designs of standing opposite her, now that it had come to the point forgot both her and the place—forgot that he had ever thought of them.

When it was all over, kinsfolk and friends came to offer their congratulations; then his comrades came to bid him good-bye, as they had heard that he was to go away next day; and then came a lot of little ones with whom he had sledged on the hills and whom he had helped at school, and some even shed a tear or two at

A HAPPY BOY

leave-taking. Last came the schoolmaster and shook hands silently with him and his parents and made a sign to go,—he would come with them. They four were together again, and this evening was to be the last. On the way there were many more who bade him good-bye and wished him luck, but they did not speak amongst themselves until they were sitting indoors at home.

The schoolmaster tried to keep up their courage; it was evident that now it had come to the point, they were all three dreading the long two years separation, seeing that hitherto they had not been parted for a single day; but none of them would own it. As the hours went on, the more heart-sick did Eyvind become; he had to go out at last to calm himself a little.

It was dusk now and there was a strange soughing in the wind; he stood on the doorstep and looked up. Then, from the edge of the rock he heard his own name softly called; it was no delusion, for it was twice re-

A HAPPY BOY

peated. He looked up and made out that a girl was sitting crouched amongst the trees and looking down.

"Who's that?" he asked.

"I hear you are going away," said she, softly, "so I had to come to you and say good-bye, as you would not come to me."

"Why, is that you, Marit? I will come up to you."

"No don't do that, I have waited such a long time and that would make me have to wait still longer. Nobody knows where I am, and I must hurry home again."

"It was kind of you to come," said he.

"I couldn't bear that you should go away like that, Eyvind; we have known each other since we were children."

"Yes, we have."

"And now we haven't spoken to each other for six months."

"No, we haven't."

"And we parted so strangely the last time."

"Yes—I must really come up to you."

"No, no, don't do that! But tell me; you're not angry with me, are you?"

"How can you think so, dear?"

"Good-bye then, Eyvind, and thank you for all our life together!"

"No, Marit——!"

"Yes, I must go now, they will miss me."

"Marit, Marit!"

"No, I daren't stop away any longer, Eyvind; good-bye!"

"Good-bye!"

After that he moved as if in a dream, and answered at random when they spoke to him. They put it down to his going away and thought it only natural; and indeed that was what was in his mind when the schoolmaster took leave at night, and put something into his hand which he afterwards found to be a five-dollar note.

But later on, when he went to bed, it was not of his going away he was thinking, but of the words which had come down from the edge of

A HAPPY BOY

the rock and of those which had gone up again. As a child she had not been allowed to come to the edge because her grandfather was afraid she might fall over. Perhaps she would one day come over all the same !

CHAPTER VIII

"MY DEAR PARENTS,

"We have got a great deal more work to do now, but now I have nearly made up to the others so that it is not so hard upon me. And there is much that I shall alter on the farm when I come home, for things are very bad there, and the only wonder is that it has held together at all. But I shall get it all into shape again, for I have now learned a great deal. I am longing to get to some place where I can put in practice what I know, so I must seek a good position when my course is finished. Here they all say that John Hatlen is not so clever as they think at home; but he has a farm of his own, and it's his own affair whether he knows much or little. Many who have gone through our course earn large salaries; that is because ours is the best

A HAPPY BOY

agricultural college in the country. Some say that one in the next county is better, but that is not at all true. Here they teach us two things: the first is called theory, and the second practice, and it is good to have them both, and the one is no good without the other, but still the last is the best. And the first word means to know the cause and reason for a piece of work, but the other means to be able to do the work, for instance as it might be with a bog. Many know what ought to be done with a bog, but do it wrongly all the same, for they haven't the power. Many have the power and don't know the reasons for things, and they may go wrong too, for there are many kinds of bogs. But we at the Agricultural College learn both things. The principal is so clever that no one can come near him. At the last Agricultural Congress he managed two questions whilst the other masters of agriculture had only one each; and when they took time to think things out, they were always as he said. But at the former Congress, when he was not present, they only talked nonsense.

A HAPPY BOY

It is on account of the principal's cleverness that he has got the lieutenant who teaches land-surveying; for the other schools have no lieutenant. But he is so clever that they say he was the very best in the school for lieutenants.

"The schoolmaster asks whether I go to church. Yes, certainly I go to church, for now the minister has got an assistant, and he preaches so that all the people in church are frightened, and that is a pleasure to hear. He is of the new religion that they have in Christiania, and people think he is too severe, but it does them good all the same.

"At present we are learning a good deal of history which we have not studied before, and it is strange to see all that has gone on in the world, and especially in our country. For we have always won except when we have lost, and that was when we were much fewer than the other people. Now we have freedom, and no other people have so much of that as we, except America; but there they are not happy. And we should love our freedom above everything."

A HAPPY BOY

"Now I will close for this time, for I have written a long letter. I daresay the school-master will read the letter, and when he answers it for you, let him tell me some news of the neighbours, for that he never does.

"Accept best greetings from

"Your affectionate son,

"E. THORESEN."

"MY DEAR PARENTS,

"I must tell you that there has been an examination here, and I have come out remarkably well in many things, and very well in writing and surveying, but only pretty well in composition in the mother tongue. The principal says that is because I have not read enough, and he has presented me with some books by Ole Vig which are splendid, for I understand everything in them. The principal is very kind to me, he tells us so many things. Everything in this country is on a very small scale compared with what they have in foreign countries; we understand almost nothing, but learn everything from

A HAPPY BOY

the Scotch and Swiss, and from the Dutch we learn gardening. Many travel to these countries ; in Sweden, too, they are much cleverer than we, and the principal himself has been there. I shall soon have been here a year, and it seems to me that I have learned a great deal ; but when I hear of all that the pupils know who go out after examination, and think that even they know nothing in comparison with foreigners, I get quite discouraged. And then the soil is so poor here in Norway compared with what it is abroad ; nothing we can do with it pays. Besides, people have no energy. And even if they had, and if the land were much better, they have no capital to work with. It is wonderful that things go as well as they do.

“I am now in the highest class, and it will be a year before I have done with it. But most of my comrades have gone, and I am longing for home. I seem somehow to stand alone, although of course I do not really ; but it is so strange when one has been away a long time. I thought at one time that I should become so

A HAPPY BOY

clever here, but there seems little enough chance of that.

"What shall I do when I come away from here? First, of course, I shall come home. Afterwards I suppose I must look out for something to do, but it must not be far away.

"Good-bye, dear parents. Greet those who ask after me, and tell them that I am well, but that I am longing to be home again.

"Your affectionate son,

"EYVIND THORESEN PLADSEN."

"DEAR SCHOOLMASTER,

"This is to ask you whether you will forward the enclosed letter and say nothing about it to anybody. And if you will not, then you must burn it.

"EYVIND THORESEN PLADSEN."

"TO THE HIGHLY-HONOURED MARIT KNUT'S-
DAUGHTER NORDISTUEN, AT THE UPPER
HILL FARMS.

"You will be much surprised to receive a

A HAPPY BOY

letter from me, but you need not be, for I only want to ask how you are getting on in every respect. You must let me know as soon as possible. As for myself, I have to tell you that I shall have finished my course here in a year.

“Most respectfully,

“EYVIND PLADSEN.”

“TO BACHELOR EYVIND PLADSEN, AT THE
AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE.

“I have duly received your letter from the schoolmaster, and I will answer since you ask me to. But I am afraid, because you are so learned, and I have a letter-writer, but there is nothing in it that will do. So I must try, and you must take the will for the deed, but you mustn't show it, or you are not the person I take you for. And you are not to keep it either, for then it might easily fall into some one's hands, but you are to burn it, you must promise me that. There are such a lot of things I should like to write about, but I don't think I dare. We have had a good harvest, potatoes are a high price,

A HAPPY BOY

and we have plenty of them here at the Hill Farms. But the bear has been terrible amongst the cattle this summer ; at Ole Nedregaard's he killed two head, and at our cottar's he knocked one about so that it had to be killed. I am weaving a large web of cloth ; it is like that Scotch stuff, and it is difficult. And now I will tell you that I am still at home, and that others would fain have it otherwise. Now I have no more to write about this time and so good-bye.

“MARIT KNUT'S-DAUGHTER.

“P.S.—Be sure you burn this letter.”

“TO AGRICULTURAL-STUDENT EYVIND PLADSEN.

“I have told you, Eyvind, that whoso walks with God, he has a portion in the good heritage. But now you shall hear my counsel, and that is : not to take the world with yearning and tribulation, but to trust to God and never let your heart consume you, for then you have another God besides Him. Next, I must tell you that your father and mother are well, but I have a bad hip ; for now the war makes itself

A HAPPY BOY

felt again, and all that one has been through. What youth sows age reaps, and that both in soul and body; which latter now smarts and aches, and tempts one to continual complaining. But age must not complain, for wounds instruct us and aches preach patience, so that a man may have strength for the last journey. To-day I have taken up my pen for many reasons, and first and foremost on Marit's account, who has become a God-fearing girl, but is as light-footed as a reindeer and unsettled in her purposes. She would like to hold to one, but her nature will not let her. But I have often seen that with such weak hearts our Lord is lenient and long-suffering, and never lets them be tempted beyond their strength, so that they are broken in pieces; for they are very fragile. I duly gave her the letter, and she hid it from all save her own heart. And if God gives this matter His countenance, I have nothing against it; for she is a delight to the eye of youth, as can plainly be seen, and she has plenty of earthly goods, and heavenly goods as well, for all her

instability. For the fear of God in her mind is like water in a shallow pond: it is there when it rains, but when the sun shines it is gone.

“My eyes will bear no more now; they see well enough out in the open, but ache and water over small things. In conclusion, I would say to you, Eyvind, in all your aspirations and labours take your God with you; for it is written, Better is an handful with quietness than both the hands full with travail and vexation of spirit.

“Your old schoolmaster,

“BAARD ANDERSEN OPDAL.”

“TO THE HIGHLY-HONOURED MARIT KNUT'S-
DAUGHTER, OF THE HILL FARMS.

“Thank you for your letter, which I have read and burnt as you told me. You write about many things, but not a word of what I wanted you to write about. I dare not write about anything certain either, until I get to know something of how it is with you in *every way*. The schoolmaster's letter says nothing that you can take hold of; but he praises you,

A HAPPY BOY

and then he says that you are unstable. You were that before. Now I don't know what I am to believe, and therefore you must write for I shall not be happy until you write. At present what I most like to remember is that you came on the rock that last evening, and what you then said to me. I will say no more this time, and so good-bye.

“Most respectfully,

“EYVIND PLADSEN.”

“TO BACHELOR EYVIND THORESEN PLADSEN.

“The schoolmaster has given me another letter from you, and I have now read it. But I don't understand it at all; I suppose that is because I am not learned. You want to know how I am in every way; and I am quite well and strong, and have nothing whatever the matter with me. I eat well, especially when I get milk-food, and I sleep at night, and sometimes in the day, too. I have danced a great deal this winter, for there have been lots of parties and great goings-on. I go to church

A HAPPY BOY

when there is not too much snow, but it has been deep this winter. Now I hope you know everything, and if you don't, then I know nothing for it but that you must write to me again.

“MARIT KNUT'S-DAUGHTER.”

“TO THE HIGHLY-HONOURED MARIT KNUT'S-
DAUGHTER.

“I have received your letter, but you seem to want me to be just as wise as I was before. I dare not write anything of what I want to write about, for I do not know you. But perhaps you don't know me, either.

“You must not believe that I am any longer the soft cheese out of which you pressed water when I sat and watched you dance. I have lain upon many a shelt to dry since that time. Nor yet am I like those long-haired dogs that for the slightest thing let their ears droop, and slip away from people, as I used to do; I take my chance now.

“Your letter was playful enough; but it was playful just where it ought not to have been; for

A HAPPY BOY

you understand me well; and you could guess that I did not ask for fun, but because of late I can think of nothing but what I asked about. I waited in deep anxiety, and then came nothing but trifling and laughter.

“Good-bye Marit Nordistuen; I shall not look too much at you, as I did at that dance. I hope you may both eat and sleep well, and finish your new web of cloth, and especially that you may shovel away the snow that lies before the church door.

“Most respectfully,

“EYVIND THORESEN PLADSEN.”

“TO EYVIND THORESEN, STUDENT OF AGRICULTURE, AGRICULTURAL COLLEGE.

“In spite of my old age, and weak eyes, and the pain in my right hip, I must yield to the urgency of youth; for it finds a use for us old folks when it has stuck fast. It coaxes and weeps until it has its way, and then it is off again directly, and will not listen to another word.

A HAPPY BOY

"Now it is Marit. She comes with many sweet words to get me to write as follows, for she dares not write alone. I have read your letter; she thought she had John Hatlen or some other fool to deal with, and not one whom schoolmaster Baard had brought up, but now she finds she's mistaken. Yet you have been too hard upon her, for there are some girls who joke in order not to cry, and both mean the same thing. But I like to see you take serious things seriously, else you cannot laugh at nonsense.

"As to the fact of your caring for each other, that is plain enough from many things. As to her, I have often had my doubts, for she is as hard to grasp as the wind ; but now I know that she has stood out against John Hatlen, and has thereby made her grandfather very angry. She was happy when your offer came, and when she joked it was not with any evil intention, but from joy. She has borne much, and she has done so in order to wait for him upon whom her heart is set. And now you will not take her, but throw her aside as a naughty child.

A HAPPY BOY

"This was what I had to tell you. And I will add this advice, that you should come to an understanding with her, for you will probably have plenty to contend with in any case. I am an old man who has seen three generations; I know folly and its courses.

"I am to greet you from your father and mother, they are longing for you. But I would not mention this before for fear of making you unhappy. You do not know your father; for he is like the tree that gives no sigh before it is hewn down. But if you once get a little nearer him, then you will learn to know him, and you will marvel as in a rich place. He has been oppressed and silent in worldly matters, but your mother has eased his mind from worldly anxiety, and now it grows clearer towards the evening or his day.

"My eyes are getting dim now, and my hand is weary. Therefore I commit you to Him whose eye ever watches, and whose hand never tires.

"BAARD ANDERSEN OPDAL."

A HAPPY BOY

"TO EYVIND PLADSEN.

"You seem to be angry with me, and that hurts me very much. For I didn't mean it like that, I meant it well. I remember that I have often treated you ill, and therefore I will now write to you, but you must not show it to anybody. At one time I had everything my own way, and then I was not good; but now nobody cares for me any more, and now I am unhappy. John Hatlen has made up a song in mockery of me, and all the boys sing it, and I dare not go to any dances. Both the old people know about it, and they scold me. But I am sitting alone, and writing, and you mustn't show it.

"You have learnt much, and can advise me, but you are now far away. I have often been down to your parents' house, and I have talked with your mother, and we have become good friends; but I did not dare to say anything because you wrote so strangely. The school-master only makes fun of me, and he knows nothing about the song, for no one in the parish would dare to sing such a thing before him.

A HAPPY BOY.

Now I am alone, and have no one to talk with. I remember when we were children, and you were so good to me, and always used to let me sit in your sledge. I wish I were a child again.

"I dare not ask you to answer me any more ; because I dare not. But if you would answer me, just once more, I would never forget it, Eyvind.

"MARIT.

"Dear, burn this letter ; I scarcely know whether I dare send it."

"DEAR MARIT,

"Thanks for your letter ; you wrote it in a good hour. Now I will tell you, Marit, that I love you so that I can hardly stay here any longer, and if only you love me too, then John's songs and other evil words shall be only leaves that the tree bears too many of. Since I got your letter I am like a new creature ; double strength has come to me, and I fear no one in the wide world. When I had sent my last

A HAPPY BOY

letter, I repented it so much that it nearly made me ill. And now you shall hear what that led to. The principal took me aside and asked what was the matter with me ; he thought I was studying too much. Then he told me that, when my year was up, I might stay for another and pay nothing ; I might help him with one thing and another, and he would teach me more. I thought then that work was the only thing left to me and I thanked him much : and even now I don't regret it although I am longing for you, for the longer I am here the better right shall I have to ask for you one day. Now that I am so happy I work for three, and never will I be behind in anything ! You shall have a book I am reading, for there is a great deal about love in it. At night I read it when the others are asleep, and then I read your letter over again too. Have you thought of when we shall meet ? I think of it so often, and you must try thinking of it too, and see how delightful it is. I am glad that I managed to write so much, although it was so hard ; for now I can

A HAPPY BOY

tell you all I want to and smile over it in my heart.

"I will give you many books to read so that you may see how many crosses they have had who truly loved each other, and how they have rather died of grief than give each other up. And so shall we do also, and do it with great joy. It may be nearly two years before we see each other, and yet longer before we get each other, but with every day that goes it is one day less ; this is what we must think whilst we work.

"In my next letter I will tell you so many things, but to-night I have no more paper and the others are asleep. So I will go to bed and think of you and go on thinking of you until I fall asleep.

"Your friend,

"EYVIND PLADSEN."

CHAPTER IX

ONE midsummer Saturday Thore Pladsen rowed across the lake to fetch his son, who was to arrive that afternoon from the Agricultural College where he had now completed his course. His mother had had women in to help her for several days beforehand, and everything was clean and scoured. Eyvind's room had long been in readiness, a stove had been put in and there he was to live. To-day the mother had strewn fresh sprigs on the floor, put out clean linen for use and arranged the bed, looking out now and then to see if any boat were coming across the lake. Downstairs there was a great table spread, and always some finishing touch to be given, or flies to be chased away; and in the best room there was always something that needed dusting. No boat yet; she leant against the window frame and

A HAPPY BOY

looked out. Then she heard a step close beside her on the road and she turned her head; it was the schoolmaster coming slowly down, leaning on a stick, for his hip was troublesome. His shrewd eyes looked calmly around; he stopped and rested on his stick and nodded to her.

"Not come yet?"

"No, I expect them every minute."

"Good weather for the hay."

"But hot walking for old people."

The schoolmaster looked smilingly at her.

"Have young people been out to-day?"

"Yes, they have, but they've gone again."

"Of course, yes; they're to meet this evening somewhere I suppose."

"Yes, no doubt; Thore says they sha'n't meet in his house until they have the old people's consent."

"Right, right!"

Presently the mother cried:

"There they come, I really believe!"

The schoolmaster looked far over the lake.

"Yes, that's they!" She left the window

A HAPPY BOY

and he entered the house. When he had rested a little and had something to drink, they went down to the lake whilst the boat scudded swiftly towards them, for both father and son were rowing. The rowers had thrown off their coats, and the watered foamed under the oars so that the boat was quickly abreast of them. Eyvind turned his head and looked up, and catching sight of those two at the landing-place, rested on his oars and called out :

“Good - day, mother ; good - day, school-master.”

“What a grown-up voice he has got,” said the mother, her face shining. “Oh, look, look, he's just as fair as ever !” she added.

The schoolmaster fended off the boat, the father shipped his oars ; Eyvind sprang past him ashore, and gave his hand first to his mother and then to the schoolmaster. He laughed and laughed again, and, quite against the peasants' custom, related at once in a stream of words all about his examinations, his journey, the principal's certificate and kind offers. He asked

A HAPPY BOY

about the year's crops, and all acquaintances, save one. The father set about unloading the boat, but, wanting to hear also, thought this could stand over, and went with the others. So they turned homewards, Eyvind laughing and pouring forth his news, the mother laughing too, for she did not know what to say. The schoolmaster limped slowly along beside them, and looked shrewdly at him; his father walked modestly a little farther off. And so they reached home. He was delighted with all he saw; first that the house had been painted, then that the mill had been added to, then that the leaden windows had been taken out of the downstairs room, and white glass put in instead of green, and the window-frames enlarged. When he went indoors everything was strangely smaller than he remembered it, but so cheerful. The clock clucked like a fat hen; the cut-away chairbacks seemed almost as if they could speak; he knew every cup upon the table; the fireplace smiled a whitewashed welcome; branches were stuck all along the walls, and gave off fragrance; juniper

A HAPPY BOY

sprigs were strewn on the floor in token of holiday. They sat down to eat, but there was not much eaten, for they talked without intermission. Each one now examined him more at leisure, noticed differences and likenesses, and observed what was entirely new about him, even to the blue Sunday clothes he was wearing. Once, when he had told a long story about one of his fine comrades and had at last finished, there was a little pause, and his father said :

"I can scarcely understand a word of what you say, boy ; you talk so frightfully fast."

They all burst out laughing, Eyvind as much as any of them. He knew quite well that it was true, but it was impossible for him to speak more slowly. All the new things he had seen and learnt in his long absence had so seized upon his imagination and intelligence, and so shaken him out of the rut of custom, that powers which had long lain dormant had, so to speak, started out of their sleep, and his head was incessantly working. And they noted, too, that he had a trick of repeating a word or two here and there

A HAPPY BOY

without any reason, repeating it over and over again from sheer hurry ; it seemed as though he tripped over himself. Sometimes it was comical, and then he laughed, and it was forgotten. The father and the schoolmaster sat and watched whether his thoughtfulness had worn away, but it did not appear so. He remembered everything ; he it was who reminded them that the boat must be unloaded. He unpacked his things immediately and hung them up, showed them his books, his watch, and all his new possessions, and they were well taken care of, his mother said. He was extremely delighted with his little room ; he wanted to remain at home to begin with, he said, to help with the haymaking, and to study. Where he would go afterwards he did not know, but it was all the same to him. He had acquired a rapidity and strength of thought which was refreshing, and a vivacity in expressing his feelings which was so good to those who, the whole year round, had been studiously repressing theirs. It made the schoolmaster ten years younger.

A HAPPY BOY

"Well, we've got *so far* with him," said he beaming, as he rose to go.

When the mother came in after the usual parting word on the doorstep, she called Eyvind into the best room.

"Some one will be expecting you at nine o'clock," whispered she.

"Where?"

"Up on the rock."

Eyvind looked at the clock; it was getting on for nine. He would not wait indoors, but went out, climbed up the rock, stopped, and looked down. The roof of the house lay close underneath; the bushes on the roof had grown larger; all the young trees round where he stood had grown, too, and he knew every one. He looked down over the road which skirted the rock, with the wood on the other side. The road lay grey and solemn, but the wood was clothed in all sorts of foliage; the trees were tall and straight. In the little bay lay a vessel with flapping sails; she was laden with planks, and waiting for a wind. He looked across the

A HAPPY BOY

water which had borne him forth and back. It lay still and shining. A few sea-birds were hovering over, but without cries, for it was late. His father came out of the mill, stopped at the doorsteps, looked out like his son, then went down to the water to see after the boat for the night. His mother came out from a side door leading from the kitchen. She looked up towards the rock as she crossed the yard with food for the fowls, and again looked up, humming to herself. He sat down to wait. The brushwood grew thick so that he could not see far in, but he listened for the slightest sound. For a long time he heard nothing but birds, which flew up and disappeared, and now a squirrel jumping from one tree into another. But at last, a long way off, there comes a crackling sound; it stops a moment, then crackles again. He rises; his heart beats, and the blood rushes to his head. Something comes breaking through the bushes close at hand. But it is a large shaggy dog that comes and looks up at him, stands still on three legs, and does not move. It is the dog

A HAPPY BOY

from Upper Hill Farm; and close behind him there is a crackling again. The dog turns his head and wags his tail. And here is Marit.

A bush had caught her dress; she turned to disengage herself, and so she stood when he first saw her. She was bareheaded and had her hair rolled up according to the every-day fashion of girls; she had on a stout, checked bodice without sleeves, nothing on her neck but the turned down linen collar; she had stolen away from working in the field, and had not dared to make herself fine. Now she looked up sideways and smiled; her white teeth and half-closed eyes shone; she stood thus a moment disentangling herself, then she came on, and got redder and redder at every step. He went to meet her, and took her hand in both his; she looked down, and so they stood.

"Thanks for all your letters," was the first thing he said, and when she looked up a little at that, and laughed, he felt that she was the most roguish fairy he could possibly have met in a wood; but he was embarrassed, and she no less.

A HAPPY BOY

"How tall you have grown!" said she, but she meant something quite different. She looked at him more and more, and laughed more and more, and so did he; but they said nothing. The dog had seated himself on the edge of the rock, and was looking down at the house; Thore noticed the dog's head from the water below, and could not for the life of him imagine what it was that showed up on the rock.

But the two had let go each other's hands, and began by degrees to talk. And when he had once begun, Eyvind soon talked so fast that she could not but laugh at him.

"Yes, you know, that's when I am happy, really happy you know; and when it was all right between us two, it was just as if a lock had burst open inside me, burst open you know."

She laughed. Presently she said:

"I know all the letters you sent me almost by heart."

"So do I yours! But you always wrote such short ones."

"Because you always wanted them long."

A HAPPY BOY

"And when I wanted you to write more about anything, you always chopped round and away from it."

"I look best when you see my back," said the witch.

"But, by-the-bye, you've never told me how you got rid of John Hatlen."

"I laughed."

"What?"

"Laughed; don't you know what it is to laugh?"

"Oh yes, I can laugh!"

"Let me see!"

"What an idea! I must have something to laugh at."

"I don't need that when I'm happy."

"Are you happy now, Marit?"

"Am I laughing now?"

"Yes, that you are!" He took both her hands and struck them together—clap, clap!—whilst he looked at her.

At this moment the dog began to growl, then all his hair bristled up, then he began to bark at

A HAPPY BOY

something right below; he got angrier and angrier until at last he was beside himself with rage. Marit started back alarmed, but Eyvind stepped forward and looked down. It was at his father that the dog was barking; he was standing right under the rock with both hands in his pockets, looking up at the dog.

"Are you up there too? What mad dog is that you've got up there?"

"It's a dog from the Hill Farms," answered Eyvind, somewhat abashed.

"How the devil did he get up there?"

But the mother, hearing the horrible noise, had looked out at the kitchen window, and understood the situation; so she laughed and said:

"That dog comes here every day, so there's nothing to be surprised at."

"It's a ferocious dog."

"He'll be better if he's patted," said Eyvind, and he patted him; the dog left off barking but continued to growl. The father went unsuspectingly away, and the two were saved from discovery.

A HAPPY BOY

"That was one time," said Marit as they met again.

"Do you mean it'll be worse another time?"

"I know some one who will keep a sharp eye on us."

"Your grandfather?"

"Exactly."

"But he can't do us any harm."

"Not a bit."

"You promise me that?"

"Yes, I promise you that, Eyvind."

"How lovely you are, Marit!"

"That's what the fox said to the crow, and got the cheese."

"I want the cheese too, I promise you!"

"But you won't get it."

"I shall take it."

She turned her head, and he did not take it.

"I'll tell you something, Eyvind," she looked up sideways.

"Well?"

"How ill-mannered you've grown!"

A HAPPY BOY

"You'll give me the cheese all the same."

"No, I won't;" she turned away again. "I must go now, Eyvind."

"I am coming with you."

"But not beyond the wood; grandfather would see you."

"No, not beyond the wood. Why, how you're running, dear."

"We can't walk side by side here."

"But this isn't being together."

"Catch me, then!"

She ran, he ran after her, and her dress was soon caught so that he overtook her.

"Have I taken you now for always, Marit?" He had his arm round her waist.

"I think so," she said softly, and laughed, but flushed red, and was instantly serious again. Well, now's the time, thought he, and he tried to kiss her, but she ducked her head down under his arm, laughed and ran away. But she stopped at the last trees.

"When shall we meet again?" she whispered.

A HAPPY BOY

"To-morrow, to-morrow!" he whispered back.

"Yes, to-morrow!"

"Good-bye," and she ran off.

"Marit!"

She stopped.

"Wasn't it strange that we met first upon the rock?"

"Yes, wasn't it?" and she ran on again.

He looked long after her; the dog ran on in front, barking up at her, and she after, hushing him.

He turned round, took off his cap and tossed it in the air, caught it and tossed it up again.

"Now, I really believe I am beginning to be happy," said the boy; and he sang as he went homewards.

CHAPTER X

ONE afternoon later in the summer, as the mother and a maid were raking up the hay, and the father and Eyvind were carrying it home, a little barefooted, bareheaded boy came hopping down the hill and across the field to Eyvind, to whom he handed a note.

“You run well!” said Eyvind.

“I am paid for it,” answered the boy. No answer was required, he said, so he made his way back again over the rock; for there was some one on the road, he explained, whom he did not want to meet. Eyvind opened the note with some trouble, for it was first folded in a strip—then folded again, then sealed and tied up.

Its contents were: “He is on his way; but

A HAPPY BOY

it is slow work. Run into the wood and hide yourself.

“YOU KNOW WHO.”

“No, I’ll be hanged if I hide,” thought Eyvind, looking defiantly up the hill. It was not long before an old man came in sight at the top of the hill; he rested, walked a little way, then rested again; both Thore and his wife stopped to look at him. Thore presently smiled; his wife, on the contrary, changed colour.

“Do you know him?”

“Yes, one couldn’t easily mistake him.”

The father and son resumed their hay-carrying, but the latter managed it so that they were always one behind the other. The old man on the hill drew slowly nearer, like a heavy sou’-wester. He was very tall and rather stout; his legs were weak, and he walked foot by foot leaning heavily on a staff. He soon came so near that they could see him distinctly; he stopped, took off his cap and wiped his head with his handkerchief. He was bald right to

A HAPPY BOY

the crown of his head; had a round, puckered face, small, glistening, blinking eyes and bushy eyebrows; he had not lost a single tooth. When he spoke it was in a sharp, barking voice which hopped as if over gravel and stones; but every now and then it would dwell with great satisfaction upon the letter "r," rolling it out, as it seemed, for yards, and at the same time jumping from one key to another. In his younger days he had been well known as a cheerful but hot-tempered man; in his old age, contrarieties of many sorts had made him passionate and suspicious.

Thore and his son had crossed and recrossed the meadow several times before Ole came up with them; they both knew quite well that he came for no good, therefore it seemed all the funnier that he could not get at them. They had both to appear quite serious and to speak very softly; but when this went on and on indefinitely the situation became irresistibly comic. A mere shred of a phrase that comes in aptly is enough, under such circumstances, to

A HAPPY BOY

set people off; especially if there happens to be some danger in laughing. When at last the old man was only a few yards away, but seemed unable to get nearer, Eyvind said drily and softly:

"What a heavy load he must be carrying!" and it needed no more.

"You're surely out of your senses," whispered the father, although he was himself laughing.

"H'm, h'm!" coughed Ole, on the hill-side.

"He's tuning up!" whispered Thore.

Eyvind fell on his knees before the haycock, buried his head in it and laughed. His father also bent down.

"Let's get into the barn," whispered he, taking an armful of hay and marching away with it; Eyvind took up a small bundle and ran after him, bent double with laughter, and threw himself down in a convulsion as soon as he got into the barn. The father was a serious man, but if anybody set him off laughing he began with a gurgling, then came longer but broken

A HAPPY BOY

trills until they flowed together in one roar, after which came wave upon wave with an ever-increasing back-draught. Now he was fairly set off; while the son lay on the floor, the father stood over him, and they both went into peals of laughter. They were subject every now and then to such hysterical fits; but "this one came at the wrong time," said the father. At last they did not know what would come of it, for the old man must by this time have got to the farm.

"I am not going out," said the father, "I have no business with him."

"Well, then, I sha'n't go either," answered Eyvind.

"H'm, h'm!" was heard just outside the barn-wall. The father shook his finger at the boy.

"Will you get out with you?"

"Yes, if you go first."

"No, off with you!"

"You go first!" And they brushed each other down and went solemnly forth. When

they had crossed the bridge* they saw Ole standing facing the kitchen door as if considering; he was holding his cap in the hand with which he held his staff, wiping the sweat off his bald head with his handkerchief, and at the same time ruffling up the bristles behind his ears and on his neck, so that they stuck out like spikes. Eyvind kept behind his father, who had therefore to bear the first brunt; and to get it over he said with stupendous solemnity:

"This is a long way for a man of your years to come."

Ole turned round, looked keenly at him, and put his cap on straight before he answered: "Yes, you're right there!"

"You must be tired; won't you come in?"

"Oh, I can rest where I am; my errand is not a long one."

Some one was peeping from the kitchen door; between her and Thore stood old Ole with the peak of his cap over his eyes; for the cap was

* An inclined plane for driving hay-carts up into the barn.

A HAPPY BOY

too large now that his hair was gone. He had thus to throw his head very far back in order to see clearly ; he held his staff pressed against his side when he was not gesticulating, and his one gesture was to throw his arm half out from him and hold it motionless as though guarding his dignity.

"Is that your son standing behind you?" he began, in a resolute voice.

"They say so."

"He is called Eyvind, isn't he?"

"Yes, they call him Eyvind."

"He has been at one of these farming-schools down south?"

"Yes, I don't say he hasn't."

"Well, my girl, my granddaughter Marit, she has gone mad lately."

"I am sorry to hear it."

"She won't marry."

"Really?"

"She won't have anything to do with any of the farmers' sons who offer themselves."

"Indeed!"

A HAPPY BOY

"And it's his fault, his—that's standing there."

"Indeed!"

"They say he's turned her head: yes, that fellow, your son Eyvind."

"The devil he has!"

"Look here, I don't like 'people running off with horses when I turn them out to pasture, and I don't like people running off with my daughters either, when I let them go to a dance; I don't like it at all."

"No, of course not."

"I can't go after them; I am old, I can't look after them."

"No—no, no—no!"

"I like things kept in order, you know—the chopping-block to stand there and the axe to lie there, and the knife there; and here they're to sweep and here they're to throw out the rubbish, not at the door, but over in the corner, precisely there and nowhere else. So, when I say to her: not him, but him! then him it must be and not him!"

"No doubt."

A HAPPY BOY

"But it isn't so. For three years she has said no, and for three years things have been amiss between us. This is bad; and it's he that's to blame for it all; and I tell him before you, his father, that it's no use, he must put a stop to it."

"Well, well."

Ole looked a moment at Thore, then he said, "You answer shortly."

"I've nothing more to say."

Here Eyvind could not help laughing, although he was in no laughing mood. But with cheerful people fear ever borders on laughter, and now he felt an impulse to laugh.

"What are you laughing at?" asked Ole, shortly and sharply.

"I——?"

"Are you laughing at me?"

"God forbid!" but his own answer made him want to laugh more.

Ole saw this and became furious. Both Thore and Eyvind tried to patch it up by putting on serious faces and inviting him to go indoors;

A HAPPY BOY

but the accumulated wrath of three years was seeking an outlet, and was not to be stopped.

"You mustn't think you're going to make a fool of me," he began; "I am here to do my duty; I am looking to my grandchild's happiness as I understand it, and the laughter of a young puppy is not going to hinder me. One doesn't bring up girls to dump them down on the first cottar's holding that offers, and one doesn't manage a farm for forty years to hand over everything to the first fellow that makes a fool of a girl. My daughter went and moped and carried on till she got herself married to a vagabond, and he drank them both to ruin, and I had to take the child and pay the piper; but curse me if my granddaughter is to go the same road! As sure as I am Ole Nordistuen of the Hill Farms, I tell you the minister shall sooner call the banns for the fairy folk up on the Nordal forest than he shall speak such names from the pulpit as Marit's and yours, you jackanapes! Are you to go and scare proper suitors away from the farm, forsooth? Just

A HAPPY BOY

you show your face there, my man, and you'll travel down the hill again in a way you won't relish. You giggling imp, you! Do you suppose I don't know what you're thinking of, you and she? You're thinking that old Ole Nordistuen will soon turn up his toes in the churchyard, and then you'll trip away to the altar together! No, I've lived sixty-six years now, and I'll show you, boy, that I'll live till you're both mighty sick of it! And, what's more, you can hang about the house till all's blue and you won't see so much as the sole of her foot, for I'll send her out of the district; I'll send her where she'll be safe, so that you can flutter around like a laughing jay and marry the rain and the north wind. And now I've nothing more to say to you; but you, his father, you know my mind, and if you wish him well you'll make him bend the river in the way it's got to run; I warn it off *my* ground."

He turned away with short, quick steps, lifting his right foot a little more strongly than the left, and muttering to himself.

A HAPPY BOY

Complete seriousness had fallen upon those he left behind ; a foreboding of evil had mingled itself with their joking and laughter, and a blank pause followed as after a shock of terror. The mother, who had heard all from the kitchen door, looked anxiously at Eyvind with tears in her eyes ; but she would not make things harder for him by saying a single word. They all went indoors in silence, and the father, seating himself by the window, looked after Ole with a very serious countenance. Eyvind watched intently his slightest change of expression ; for did not the future of the young people almost depend upon his first words ? If Thore added his refusal to that of Ole, they could scarcely hope to get over it. His thoughts ran apprehensively from obstacle to obstacle ; for a moment he saw only poverty, opposition, misunderstanding and wounded self-respect, and every resource he could think of seemed destined to fail him. His uneasiness was increased by his mother's standing there with her hand on the latch of the kitchen door, uncertain whether she had

A HAPPY BOY

courage to stay in and await the upshot, and by her at last losing heart and slipping out. Eyvind looked steadily at his father, who, it seemed, was never going to look round; nor did the son venture to speak, for he understood that the thing must be fully thought out. But presently his soul had run its course of anxiety and regained its firmness. "After all," he thought within himself as he looked at his father's knitted brow, "God alone can part us." And just at this moment something happened. Thore heaved a long sigh, rose, looked into the room and met his son's gaze. He stopped and looked long at him.

"I should be best pleased if you gave her up, for one ought not to beg or bully oneself forward in the world. But if you won't give her up, tell me when you've made up your mind, and perhaps I may be able to help you."

He went to his work and his son went with him.

By the evening Eyvind had his plan complete: he would try for the post of District Inspector

A HAPPY BOY

of Agriculture, and would beg the Principal of the College and the Schoolmaster to help him. "Then, if she holds out, with God's help I will win her through my work."

He waited in vain for Marit that evening, but as he waited he sang his favourite song :

Lift thy head, brave lad, for token
That, if past-time hopes be broken,
New ones sparkle in an eye,
That takes light from God on high.

Lift thy head, and gaze around thee,
Something new hath sought and found thee ;
Something that with myriad voice
Bids the heart in thee rejoice.

Lift thy head ; for harps are ringing,
Footsteps dancing, voices singing,
And the vault of heaven so blue,
Is thine own soul beaming through.

Lift thy head, and sing unhidden !
Spring disdains the winds frost-ridden ;
When the sap is rich and clear
Burgeoning shoots will greet the year.

Lift thy head, baptized for ever
In the flood of hope's bright river,
That across the gleaming world
Like a rainbow is unfurled.

CHAPTER XI

It was the middle of the dinner-hour. The people were sleeping at the big Hill Farm ; the hay lay tossed about the meadows just as they had left it, and the rakes were stuck in the ground. Down by the barn-bridge stood the hay-sledges, the harness was heaped on one side, and the horses were tethered a little way off. Except the horses, and a few hens which had strayed into the field, there was not a living creature to be seen on the whole plain.

In the mountain above the farms there was a gap, through which the road passed to the Hill Farm sæters, on the great, grassy mountain meadows. On this day a man stood in the gap, and looked down over the plain, as if he were expecting somebody. Behind him lay a little mountain lake, from which flowed the beck that

formed the ravine. Around this lake, on both sides, cattle-paths led up towards the sæters, which he could see in the far distance. There was a shouting and barking away beyond him, bells tinkled along the hillsides, for the cows were hurrying to seek the water, while the dogs and herd-boys tried to collect them, but in vain. The cows came tearing along with the most wonderful antics, made leaps where the ground was rough, and ran, with short and fierce bellowings and their tails in the air, right down into the water, where they remained standing. Their bells chimed over the surface of the lake every time they moved their heads. The dogs drank a little, but remained on dry land. The herd-boys followed, and seated themselves on the warm, smooth rock. Here they took out their provisions, exchanged with each other, bragged about their dogs, their oxen, and their people at home. They presently undressed, and jumped into the water beside the cows. The dogs would not come into the water, but poked lazily about with drooping heads, hot eyes, and tongues

A HAPPY BOY

hanging out on one side. On the surrounding leas no bird was to be seen; no sound was heard but the youngster's chatter and the tinkling of the bells. The heather was withered and burnt up. The sun shone bakingly on the expanses of the rock, so that everything was suffocatingly hot.

It was Eyvind who sat up here in the midday sun, and waited. He sat in his shirt-sleeves close by the beck that flowed out of the lake. No one was as yet to be seen on the Hill Farm plain, and he was beginning to be a little afraid, when suddenly a large dog came heavily out of a door at Nordistuen, and after it a girl with white sleeves. She ran over the grassy hillocks towards the mountain. He wanted very much to shout to her, but he dared not. He watched the house attentively to see whether any one should chance to come out and notice her; but she was sheltered from view. He, too, lost sight of her, and rose several times in his impatience to watch for her coming.

At last she came, working her way up along

A HAPPY BOY

the bed of the stream, the dog, a little in front, sniffing the air, she holding by the bushes, and with ever-wearier pace. Eyvind ran down; the dog growled and was hushed, and directly Marit saw him she sat down on a large stone, her face all flushed, wearied and overcome by the heat. He swung himself up on the stone beside her.

"Thank you for coming!"

"What heat, and what a road! Have you been waiting long?"

"No. Since they watch us in the evening we must use the dinner-hour. But I think that henceforward we oughtn't to be so secret and take so much trouble: that's just what I wanted to talk to you about."

"Not secret?"

"I know things please you best when there's a touch of mystery about them; but to show courage pleases you too. I have a lot to say to you to-day, and you must listen."

"Is it true that you are trying for the post of District Inspector?"

A HAPPY BOY.

"Yes; and I shall get it too. I have a double object in that: first, to make a position for myself, and after that, and more especially, to accomplish something that your grandfather can see and appreciate. It's a lucky thing that most of the owners of the Hill Farms are young people who want improvements and are seeking help; they have money, too. So I shall begin there. I will look after everything, from their cowhouses to their irrigation-channels. I shall give lectures and keep things going. I shall, so to speak, besiege the old man with good work."

"That's bravely spoken. Go on, Eyvind."

"Well, the rest concerns us two. You mustn't go away——"

"But if he orders me to?"

"Nor keep anything secret about yourself and me."

"But if he persecutes me?"

"We shall produce more effect and make our position better by letting everything be open. We should make a point of being so much under

A HAPPY BOY

people's eyes that they can't help talking of how we love each other ; they will wish us well all the more. You must not go away. When people are apart there is always a danger of gossip coming between them. For the first year we should not believe anything, but in the second year we might gradually begin to believe a little. We two will meet once a week, and laugh away all the mischief they will try to make between us. We shall be able to meet at dances, and foot it so that it rings again, whilst our backbiters sit around and look on. We shall meet at the church, and greet each other in the sight of all those who wish us a hundred miles apart. If any one makes up a song about us, we will lay our heads together, and try to make up one in answer ; we're sure to manage it if we help each other. No one can hurt us if we hold together, and let people see that we do. Unhappy lovers are always either timid people or weak people, or unhealthy people, or calculating people who wait for a certain opportunity ; or crafty people who at last burn their fingers

A HAPPY BOY

with their own cunning, or ease-loving people who don't care enough about each other to forget differences of wealth and station. They go and hide themselves, and send letters, and tremble at a word; and this terror, this perpetual unrest and pricking in the blood they come at last to take for love; they are unhappy and melt away like sugar. Pooh! If they really loved each other they would not be afraid, they would laugh; in every smile and every work, people should see the church-door looming ahead. I've read about it in books, and I've seen it too: it's a poor sort of love that goes the back way. It must begin in secrecy because it begins in timidity, but it must live in openness because it lives in joy. It is like the changing of the leaves: those that are to grow cannot hide themselves, and you see how all the dry leaves hanging to the trees fall off the moment the sprouting begins. He to whom love comes lets drop whatever old, dead rubbish he may have clung to; when the sap starts and throbs, do you think no one is to notice it?

A HAPPY BOY

Ha, girl, they'll be happy at seeing us happy! Two lovers who hold out against the world do people a positive service, for they give them a poem which their children learn by heart to shame the unbelieving parents. I have read of so many such cases, and some of them live, too, in the mouths of the people hereabouts; and it's precisely the children of those who once caused all the trouble that now tell the stories, and are moved by them. Yes, Marit, we two will shake hands upon it—like that, yes—and promise each other to hold together, and you'll see all will come right. Hurrah!" He wanted to put his arm round her neck but she turned her head, and slipped down from the stone.

He remained sitting, and she came back, and with her arms upon his knee she stood and talked to him, looking up in his face.

"Tell me now, Eyvind, if he's determined to send me away, what then?"

"Then you must say no, straight out."

"Is that possible, dear?"

A HAPPY BOY

"He can't very well carry you out, and put you in the carriage."

"If he doesn't exactly do that, he can compel me in many other ways."

"I don't think so. Of course you owe him obedience so long as it's no sin; but you owe it to him also to let him understand how hard it is for you to be obedient in this matter. I think he'll come to his senses when he sees that; at present he thinks, like most people, that it's only child's play. Show him it is something more."

"He isn't easy to manage, I can tell you. He keeps me like a tethered goat."

"But you slip your tether many times a day."

"No, I don't."

"Yes; every time you secretly think of me you slip it."

"Yes, that way. But are you so sure that I think so often of you?"

"You wouldn't be here else."

"My dear, didn't you send me a message to come?"

A HAPPY BOY

"But you came because your thoughts drove you."

"Say rather because the weather was so beautiful."

"You said just now that it was too hot."

"To go *up* hill, yes; but *down* again!"

"Then why did you come up?"

"So as to run down again."

"Why haven't you run down already?"

"Because I had to rest."

"And talk with me of love."

"There was no reason why I shouldn't give you the pleasure of listening to you."

"Whilst the birds were singing"—"and the folk slept sound"—"and the bells were ringing"—"in the woods around."

Here they both saw Marit's grandfather come stumping out into the yard and go to the bell-rope to ring the people up. The people dragged themselves out of barns, sheds and rooms, went sleepily to the horses and rakes, dispersed over the fields, and in a few minutes all was life and work once more.

A HAPPY BOY

The grandfather, left alone, went from one house into another and at last up on the highest barn-bridge to look out. A little boy came running to him, he had probably called him. The boy, as they foresaw, set off in the direction of Pladsen, the grandfather meanwhile searching round the farm; and as he often looked upwards he seemed at least to have some suspicion that the black speck up on the Big Stone must be Marit and Eyvind. A second time Marit's big dog must needs make mischief. He saw a strange horse drive into the Hill Farm, and fancying himself on active service as watch-dog, he began to bark with all his might. They tried to hush him, but he had got angry and would not leave off, the grandfather meanwhile standing below and staring straight up into the air. But matters grew worse and worse, for all the herd-boys' dogs were astonished to hear the strange voice and ran to the spot. When they saw that it was a great wolf-like giant, all the straight-haired, Finnish dogs set upon him. Marit was so frightened that she ran away without any leave-

A HAPPY BOY

taking ; Eyvind rushed into the thick of the fray and kicked and belaboured, but they only shifted their battle-ground and then met again with horrible howls. He dashed after them again, and so it went on until they waltzed themselves down to the edge of the beck. Then he ran at them, and the consequence was that they all rolled down into the water just at a place where it was nice and deep. This parted them at last and they slunk away ashamed ; and so ended the battle. Eyvind went through the wood till he struck the by-road ; but Marit met her grandfather up at the farm fence ; and for this she had her dog to thank.

“ Where have you come from ? ”

“ From the wood.”

“ What were you doing there ? ”

“ Gathering berries.”

“ That's not true.”

“ No ; it isn't true.”

“ What were you doing then ? ”

“ I was talking to some one.”

“ Was it to that Pladsen boy ? ”

A HAPPY BOY

"Yes."

"Look here now, Marit, to-morrow you go away."

"No."

"I tell you, Marit, you have just got to make up your mind to it—you *shall* go away."

"You can't lift me into the carriage."

"No? can't I?"

"No, because you won't."

"Won't I? Now look here, Marit, just for the fun of the thing, just for fun I tell you, I'll thrash that beggar-boy of yours within an inch of his life."

"No, you wouldn't dare to."

"Wouldn't dare to? Do you say I wouldn't dare to? Who would do anything to me? Who, eh?"

"The schoolmaster."

"The schoo—school—schoolmaster? Do you suppose he bothers himself about him?"

"Yes; it was he who kept him at the Agricultural College."

"The schoolmaster?"

A HAPPY BOY

"The schoolmaster."

"Look here Marit, I won't have these goings-on; you shall go out of the place. You bring me nothing but trouble and grief; it was the same with your mother before you, nothing but trouble and grief. I am an old man; I want to see you well provided for; I won't be the laughing-stock of the district when I am dead and gone, on your account. I'm only thinking of your own good; you ought to thank me for that, Marit. It will soon be all over with me, and then you'll be left alone. What would have become of your mother if I hadn't been there to help her? Be sensible now, Marit, and attend to what I say. I'm thinking only of your own good."

"No, you're not."

"Indeed? What am I thinking of, then?"

"You want simply to have your own way, that's what you want; and you never trouble about what *I* want."

"So you're to have a will of your own, are you, madam? Of course you understand what's

A HAPPY BOY

best for you, you fool ! I'll give you a taste of my stick ; that's what I'll do, for all you're so big and bouncing. Look here now, Marit, let me talk sense to you. You're not such a fool at bottom, but you've got a bee in your bonnet. You must listen to me. I am an old man, and I know what's what. I want you to see reason. I'm not so well off as people think ; a pennyless ne'er-do-well would soon run through the little I have ; your father made a big hole in it, he did. Let us take care of ourselves in this world ; there's nothing else for it. It's all very well for the schoolmaster to talk, he has money of his own ; so has the minister ; they can afford to preach, they can. But we, who must toil for our living, with us it's another matter. I am old, I know a great deal, I have seen many things. Love, you know, love's all very well to talk about, yes, but it's worth mighty little ; it's good enough for ministers and the like ; peasants must take things in another way. First food, you see, then God's Word, and then a little writing and reckoning, and then a little

A HAPPY BOY

love if it happens so; but curse me if it's any use to begin with love and end with food. What do you answer to that, Marit?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know what you ought to answer?"

"Yes, I know that."

"Well, then?"

"Shall I say it?"

"Yes, say it, of course."

"My whole heart is in this love."

He stood a moment dismayed, then remembered a hundred similar conversations with a similar issue, shook his head, turned his back on her and walked away.

He descended upon the labourers, abused the girls, thrashed the big dog, and nearly frightened the life out of a little hen which had strayed into the field, albeit to her he said nothing.

That night when she went up to bed Marit was so happy that she opened the windows, leant on the window-sill, looked out and sang.

A HAPPY BOY

She had got hold of a delicate little love-song
and she sang it :

Art thou fond of me ?
I'll be fond of thee
All the years of life we live together,
Summer may slip away,
The grassy fields decay,
But memory holds the sports of sweet spring weather.

What you said last year
Aye murmurs in my ear,
Like a caged bird fluttering in my bosom :
Sits and shakes its wings,
Titters there and sings,
Waiting till the sunshine wakes the blossom.

Litli-litli-lo !
Hearest thou me so,
Boy behind the sheltering hedge of birches ?
The woods will flicker past,
The dusk is falling fast,
Canst find the way for which my blind foot searches

I shut my window wide,
What do you want beside ?
The sounds come back through evening's tender
 gloaming ;
With laughing, beckoning notes,
Their music towards me floats.
What wilt thou ? Ah, how sweet a night for roaming.

CHAPTER XII

SOME years have passed since the last scene.

It is late autumn ; the schoolmaster comes up to Nordistuen, opens the outer door, finds no one at home ; opens another, finds no one at home ; goes on and on to the innermost room of the long building, and there sits Ole Nordistuen alone by the bed, looking at his hands.

They exchange greetings ; the schoolmaster takes a stool and seats himself opposite Ole.

" You sent for me," he says.

" Yes, I did."

The schoolmaster takes a fresh quid, looks around the room, takes up a book which is lying on the bench and turns over the leaves.

" What was it you wanted to say to me ?"

" I am iust thinking about it."

The schoolmaster is very leisurely in his

A HAPPY BOY

movements, takes out his spectacles to read the title of the book, polishes them, and puts them on.

"You're getting old now, Ole."

"Yes, it was about that I wanted to speak to you. I am going downhill; I shall soon be bedridden."

"Then you must see to it that you lie easy, Ole." He shuts the book and sits looking at the binding.

"That's a good book that you have in your hands."

"It's not bad; have you often got beyond the cover, Ole?"

"Yes, just lately, I've——"

The schoolmaster lays down the book and puts by his spectacles.

"Things are not just as you would wish with you now, Ole?"

"They haven't been for as far back as I can remember."

"Oh, for a long time it was the same with me. I fell out with a good friend, and waited

A HAPPY BOY

for *him* to come to *me*, and all that time I was unhappy. Then I contrived to go to *him* and then it was all right."

Ole looks up and is silent.

The schoolmaster: "How is the farm getting on, Ole?"

"It's going downhill, like myself."

"Who is to take it when you are gone?"

"That's just what I don't know; and that's what's worrying me."

"Your neighbours are getting on well, Ole."

"Yes, they have that Inspector of Agriculture to help them."

The schoolmaster, turning indifferently towards the window: "You ought to have help too, Ole. You can't get about much, and you're not up in the new methods."

Ole: "There's no one that would be willing to help me."

"Have you *asked* any one?"

Ole is silent.

The schoolmaster: "I was like that, too, with our Lord for a long time. 'Thou art not

A HAPPY BOY

kind to me,' I said to him. 'Have you asked me to be?' he replied. No, I had not; so then I prayed to him and since then all has been well with me."

Ole is silent, and the schoolmaster too is silent now.

At last Ole says:

"I have a grandchild; she knows what would make me happy before I go, but she doesn't do it."

The schoolmaster smiles.

"Perhaps it would not make her happy?"

Ole is silent.

The schoolmaster: "There are many things that are worrying you, but so far as I can make out they are all in the end connected with the farm."

Ole says quietly: "It has passed from father to son through many generations and it's good land. All the labour of my fathers, man after man, lies in the soil; but now it does not bear. And when they drive me away I don't know who is to drive in. There is no one of the family."

"Your granddaughter will keep up the family."

"But he who takes her, how will he take the farm? That's what I want to know before I lie down. There's no time to be lost, Baard, either for me or for the farm."

They are both silent; then the schoolmaster says: "Shall we go out a bit and have a look at the farm in this fine weather?"

"Yes, let us; I have workpeople upon the slopes, they are gathering in the leaves; but they don't work except just when I have my eye on them."

He shambles about to get his big cap and his stick, and says meanwhile: "They don't seem to like working for me; I don't understand it."

When they had got out and were turning the corner of the house he stopped.

"Here, do you see? No order: the wood scattered all about; the axe not stuck into the chopping-block;" he stooped with difficulty, lifted it and struck it firmly in. "There you see a trap that has fallen down, but no one has

A HAPPY BOY

picked it up." He did it himself. "And here, the storehouse. Do you think the steps have been taken away?" He moved them aside. Then he stopped, looked at the schoolmaster and said: "And that's how things go every day."

As they went upwards they heard a merry song from the uplands.

"Come now, they're singing at their work," said the schoolmaster.

"That's little Knut Ostistuen who is singing; he's gathering leaves for his father. My people are working over there; you may be sure they're not singing."

"That song doesn't belong to these parts, does it?"

"No, so I can hear."

"Eyvind Pladsen has been over at Ostistuen a great deal; perhaps it's one of the songs he brought into the parish; there's plenty of singing where he is."

To this there was no answer.

The field they were crossing was not in good

A HAPPY BOY

order; it had been neglected. The school-master remarked upon it and Ole stopped.

"I haven't the strength to do more," said he, almost with tears. "Strange workpeople with no one to look after them come too expensive. But I can tell you it's hard to go over fields in this state."

As the talk now fell upon the size of the farm and what parts stood most in need of cultivation, they decided to go up on the slopes and look over the whole of it. When at last they had reached a high spot where they had a good view, the old man was moved.

"I am very loth to go and leave it like this. We have worked down there, I and my fathers, but it doesn't show much sign of it."

A song burst forth right over their heads with the peculiar piercingness of a boy's voice when he sings with all his might. They were not far from the tree in whose top little Knut Ostistuen sat pulling leaves for his father, and they had to listen to the boy:

A HAPPY BOY

When you tread the mountain-path
With a scrip to tarry,
Put no more within its fold
Than you well can carry.
Never drag the valley's cares,
Up steep precipices ;
Hurl them in a joyous song,
Down the wild abysses.

Birds shall greet you from the bough
The hamlet sounds grow shyer,
The air becomes more pure and sweet
Ever as you climb higher.
Fill your happy breast, and sing,
And as your old life closes,
From every bush dear childlike thoughts
Will nod with cheeks like roses.

If you pause, and listen well,
With ear attuned to wonder,
The mighty song of solitude
Will fill the void like thunder ;
Even a rivulet's hurrying course,
Even a stone down stealing,
Will bring neglected duty by
As with an organ's pealing.

Quake, but plead, thou timorous soul,
Amidst thy memories shield thee ;
Go on and up, the better part
The topmost peak shall yield thee,
There, as of yore, with Jesus Christ,
Elias walks, and Moses :
In such a blest ecstatic sight
Thy toilsome journey closes.

A HAPPY BOY

Ole had sat down and hidden his face in his hands.

"I will talk to you here," said the school-master, and sat down beside him.

* * * * *

Down at Pladsen Eyvind had just come home from a longish journey ; the post-chaise was still at the door, whilst the horse rested. Although Eyvind was now making a good income as District Inspector, he still lived in his little room down at Pladsen, and gave a helping hand between whiles. Pladsen was under cultivation from one end to the other, but it was so small that Eyvind called the whole of it Mother's Doll Farm ; for it was she who specially looked after the farming.

He had just changed his clothes ; his father had come in all white and floury from the mill, and had also changed. They were talking of going for a little walk before supper, when the mother came in quite pale.

"Here are strange visitors coming. Just look !"

A HAPPY BOY

Both men went to the window, and it was Eyvind who first exclaimed: "That's the schoolmaster, and—why, I declare, yes, it's really he!"

"Yes, it's old Ole Nordistuen," said Thore turning from the window so as not to be seen, or the two were already coming up to the house.

As he left the window Eyvind caught the schoolmaster's eye. Baard smiled, and looked back at old Ole, who was plodding along the road with his stick, taking his usual short steps, and always lifting one leg a little higher than the other. The schoolmaster was heard to say outside:

"He has just come home."

And Ole said twice: "Well, well!"

They stood a long time silent in the passage. The mother had crept over to the corner where the milk-shelf was; Eyvind was in his favourite position, with his back against the large table and his face towards the door; his father sat beside him. At last there was a knock, and in

A HAPPY BOY

walked the schoolmaster and took off his hat ; then Ole, and took off his cap ; after which he turned to close the door. He was slow in turning, and was obviously embarrassed. Thore rose, and asked them to come in and sit down. They seated themselves side by side on the bench by the window. Thore sat down again.

And the wooing went on as follows :

The schoolmaster : " We've got fine weather this autumn after all."

Thore : " It has settled now at last."

" It will be settled for some time, too, since the wind has gone over to that quarter."

" Have you finished harvesting up yonder ? "

" No ; Ole Nordistuen here, whom I daresay you know, would be glad of your help, Eyvind, if it's not inconvenient."

Eyvind : " If it is desired I will do what I can."

" You see it's not mere momentary help he means. He thinks the farm is not getting on very well, and he thinks that it's method and supervision that's wanting."

A HAPPY BOY

Eyvind : "I'm so much from home."

The schoolmaster looks at Ole. Feeling that he must now put in his oar, Ole clears his throat a time or two, and begins quickly and shortly :

"The idea was—it is—yes—the idea is that you should, in a manner of speaking—that you should make your home up there with us—be there when you aren't out."

"Many thanks for the offer, but I prefer to live where I live now."

Ole looks at the schoolmaster, who says : "You see Ole's a little confused to-day. The thing is that he came here once before, and the remembrance of that puts his words out of order."

Ole, quickly : "That's it, yes. I behaved like an old fool. I tugged against the girl so long that our life went to splinters. But let bygones be bygones ; the wind breaks down the grain, but not the breeze ; rain-driblets do not loosen big stones ; snow in May does not lie long ; it is not the thunder that strikes people dead."

They all four laughed. The schoolmaster

A HAPPY BOY

says : " Ole means that you must not think of it any more ; nor you either, Thore."

Ole looks at them, and does not know whether he dares begin again. Then Thore says : " Briars scratch with many teeth but don't make deep wounds. There are certainly no thorns left sticking in me."

Ole : " I didn't know the boy then. Now I see that what he sows grows ; autumn answers to spring ; he has money in his finger-ends, and I should like to get hold of him."

Eyvind looks at his father, then at his mother ; she looks from them at the schoolmaster, and then they all look at him.

" Ole means that he has a large farm——"

Ole interrupts : " A large farm, but ill managed. I can do no more. I am old, and my legs won't run my head's errands. But it would be worth any one's while to put his shoulder to the wheel up there."

" The largest farm, by far, in the district," the schoolmaster put in.

" The largest farm in the district, that's just

A HAPPY BOY

the difficulty ; shoes that are too big fall off ; it's well to have a good gun, but you must be able to lift it." Turning quickly to Eyvind : " You could give us a hand, couldn't you ? "

" You want me to be manager ? "

" Exactly, yes ; you would have the farm."

" I should *have* the farm ? "

" Exactly, yes ; then you would manage it."

" But——"

" Don't you want to ? "

" Of course I do."

" Well well, then that's settled, as the hen said when she flew across the lake."

" But——"

Ole looks in surprise at the schoolmaster.

" Eyvind wants to know if he's to have Marit too ? "

Ole quickly : " Marit into the bargain, Marit into the bargain ! "

Then Eyvind burst out laughing, and jumped up from his seat, the other three laughing with him. Eyvind rubbed his hands and went up and down repeating incessantly :

A HAPPY BOY

"Marit into the bargain, Marit into the bargain!"

Thore laughed with a deep chuckle, and the mother up in the corner kept her eyes fixed on her son until they filled with tears.

Ole, very anxiously: "What do you think of the farm?"

"Splendid land!"

"Splendid land, isn't it?"

"Capital pasturage!"

"Capital pasturage! It'll do, won't it?"

"It shall be the best farm in the country."

"The best farm in the country! Do you think so? Do you mean it?"

"As sure as I stand here!"

"Now isn't that just what I said?"

They both talked equally fast, and fitted in with each other like a pair of cog-wheels.

"But money, you see, money? I have no money."

"It goes slowly without money, but still it goes."

"It goes! yes, or course it goes But if

A HAPPY BOY

we *had* money, it would go quicker, wouldn't it?"

"Ever so much quicker."

"Ever so much? If only we had money Well, well; one can chew even if one hasn't all one's teeth; though you only drive oxen you get in at last."

The mother was making signs to Thore, who looked at her sideways, quickly and often, as he sat rocking his body and stroking his knees with his hands; the schoolmaster blinked at him. Thore had his mouth open, cleared his throat a little and tried to speak; but Ole and Eyvind answered each other so incessantly, and laughed and made such a noise, that no one could get a word in edgewise.

"Please be quiet a bit; Thore has something he wants to say," the schoolmaster puts in; they stop and look at Thore. He begins at last quite softly:

"It's been like this: here at Pladsen we have had a mill; latterly it has been so that we have had two. These mills have always brought in a

A HAPPY BOY

trifle in the course of the year, but neither my father nor I ever used any of the money, except the time when Eyvind was away. The schoolmaster has invested it for me, and he says it has thriven well where it is ; but now it will be best for you, Eyvind, to have it for Nordistuen."

The mother stood over in the corner, and made herself quite small whilst with sparkling joy she gazed at Thore, who was very serious and looked almost stupid ; Ole Nordistuen sat opposite him with his mouth agape. Eyvind was the first to recover from his astonishment and exclaiming : "Doesn't luck follow me !" he went across the room to his father, and slapped him on the shoulder so that it rang again.

"Father !" said he, rubbed his hands and continued to pace the room.

"How much money might there be ?" asked Ole at last, but softly, of the schoolmaster.

"It's not so little."

"A few hundreds ?

"A little more.'

"A little more ?—a little more, Eyvind ! God

A HAPPY BOY

bless me, what a farm we shall make of it!" He rose and laughed heartily.

"I must come up with you to Marit," says Eyvind; "we can take the post-chaise that is standing outside, we shall get there quicker."

"Yes, quick, quick! Do you, too, want to have everything quick?"

"Yes, quick as quick can be!"

"Quick as quick can be! Exactly like me when I was young, exactly!"

"Here's your hat and stick; now I'm going to show you the door!"

"You show me the door, ha, ha! but you're coming too, aren't you? you're coming? And you others too; we must sit together this evening, so long as there's a spark in the stove; come along!"

They promised, Eyvind helped him into the chaise and they drove off up to Nordistuen. Up there the big dog was not the only one to be astonished when Ole Nordistuen drove into the yard with Eyvind Pladsen. Whilst Eyvind helped him out of the chaise and servants and

A HAPPY BOY

hired folk stood gaping at them, Marit came out into the passage to see why the dog kept on barking so, but she stopped as it spell-bound, flushed all red and ran in again. Old Ole, however, shouted so loud for her when he came into the house, that she had to come forward again.

"Go and tidy yourself, girl: here is he who is to have the farm!"

"Is that true?" said she, in a ringing voice, without knowing what she said.

"Yes, it is true," answered Eyvind and claps his hands; whereupon she swings round on her toes, throws what she is holding in her hands far from her, and runs out—but Eyvind runs after her.

Shortly after, the schoolmaster, Thore and his wife arrived; the old man had candles on the table which was covered with a white cloth; wine and ale were produced, and he himself went round continually, lifting his legs higher even than usual, but always lifting the right foot higher than the left.

*

*

*

*

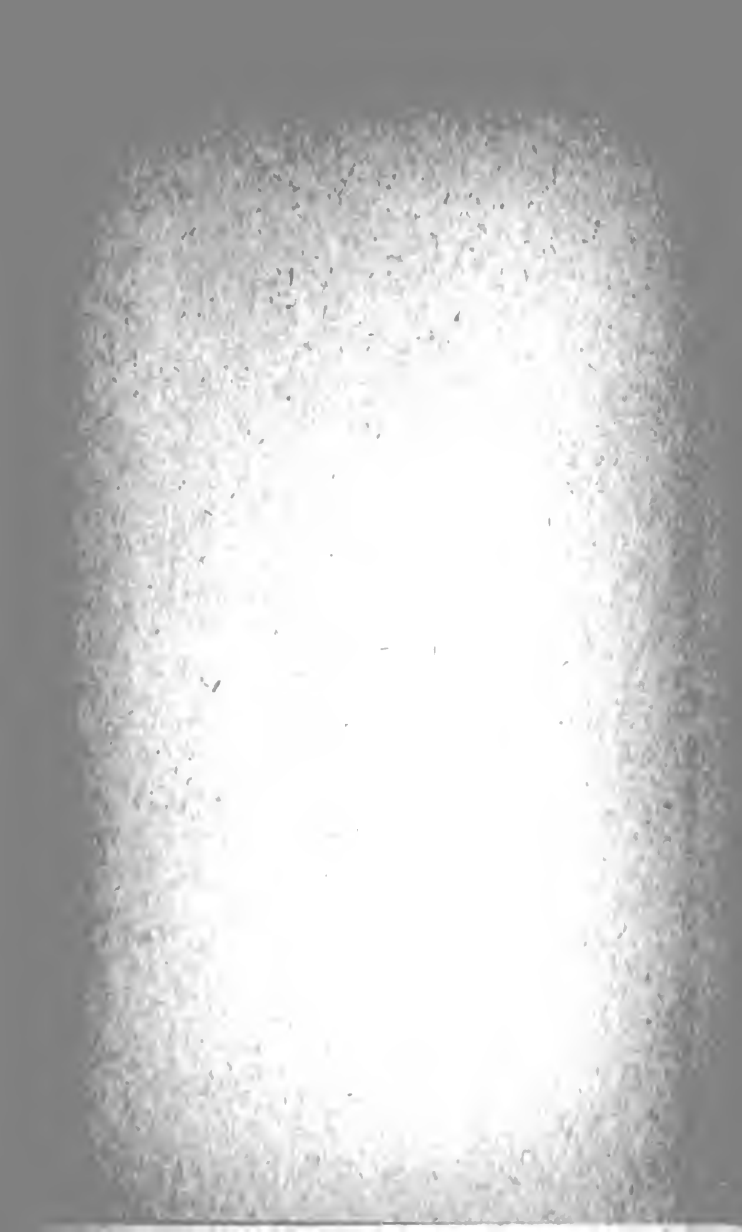
*

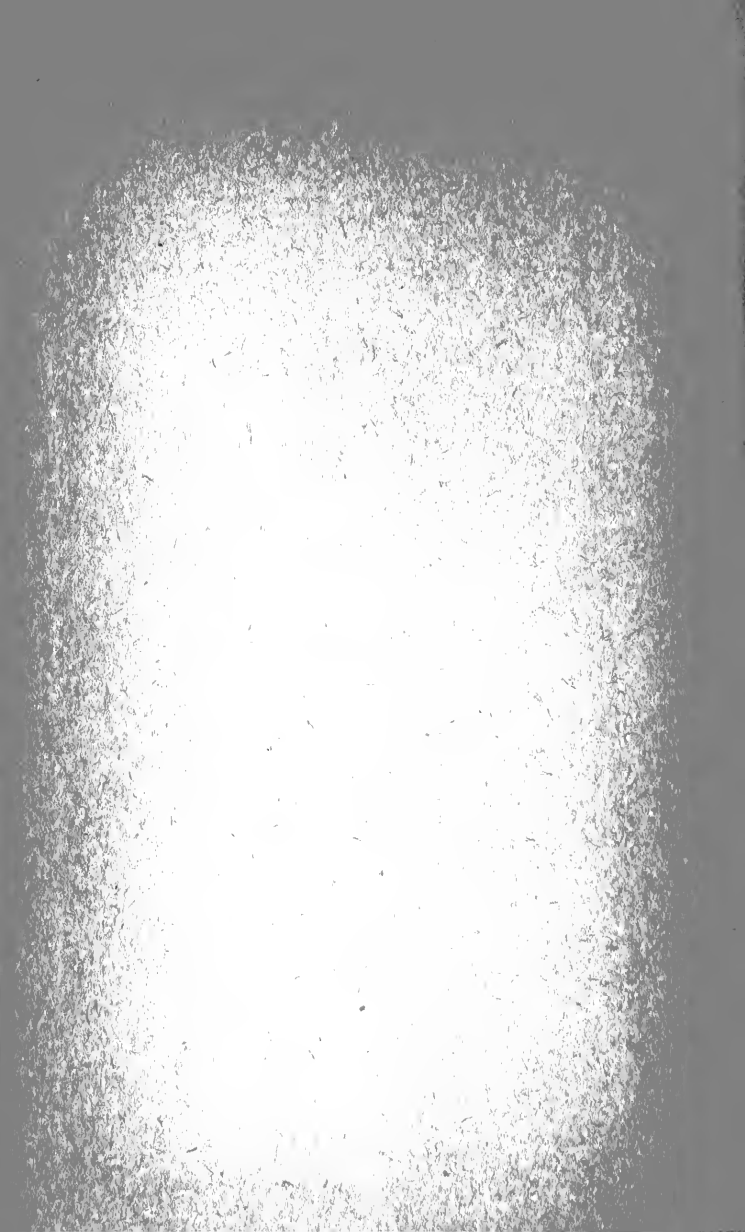
A HAPPY BOY

Before this little tale ends it may be stated that five weeks later Eyvind and Marit were married in the parish church. The schoolmaster himself led the singing that day as his assistant was ill. His voice was cracked now, for he was old ; but Eyvind thought it did one good to hear him. And when he had given his hand to Marit and led her up to the altar, the schoolmaster nodded to him from the choir just as Eyvind had seen him do when he was sorrowfully watching that dance ; he nodded back, whilst tears rose to his eyes.

Those tears at the dance were the prelude to these ; and between them lay his faith and his work.

Here ends the story of a Happy Boy.

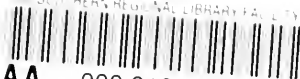








SOUTHERN REGIONAL LIBRARY FACILITY



AA

000 312 797 4

